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CRITICAL ESSAYS,

&c. &c.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It was not till after the title-page of the present work had been engraved, that the author had any intention of quitting the NEWS; *but he now writes exclusively for the paper called the* EXAMINER, *of which the reader may see a prospectus at the end of the volume. It was necessary to state this, that he might not commence his work with an utter falshood.*

CRITICAL ESSAYS

ON THE

PERFORMERS OF THE LONDON THEATRES,

INCLUDING

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

ON THE PRACTISE AND GENIUS OF THE STAGE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE THEATRICAL CRITICISMS IN THE WEEKLY PAPER CALLED THE NEWS.

Respicere exemplar vitæ morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatorem, et veras hinc ducere voces.
HORACE.

LONDON.
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TO

MR. JOHN HUNT,

AT WHOSE SUGGESTION IT WAS ATTEMPTED,

THE FOLLOWING WORK IS

INSCRIBED,

BY HIS AFFECTIONATE BROTHER,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

It will be pardoned me if I speak a little of myself, when I am going to say so much about others. If I have not been long intimate with theatrical affairs, I have endeavoured to give them no slight attention. The first time I ever saw a play was in March 1800; it was the *Egyptian Festival* of one Mr. Franklin: the scenery enchanted me, and I went home with the hearty jollity of Mr. Bannister laughing all the way before me. After that I was present at the comedies of Mr. Reynolds and of Mr. Dibdin, and I laughed very heartily at the grimaces of the actors; but somehow or another I never recollected a word of the dialogue. Any schoolboy, who had been accustomed to nothing but natural objects,

would have admired these comedies just in the same way. Admirable indeed as they were, they struck me with very peculiar sensations. It was not that I wished them to be like the productions of TERENCE, who had afflicted me, or of ARISTOPHANES, who had made me sick; but I had been accustomed to fancy that the comedies of BEAUMONT and FLETCHER, of CONGREVE, and of SHERIDAN, as far as genius was concerned, were the true models of writing. I listened however with attention to the new dramas; I listened to the applauses of the theatre; and I began to examine whether MR. REYNOLDS and MR. DIBDIN were not the true comic writers. It was then that I discovered what excellent actors we possessed.

If any man, not very fond of music, will reflect a little between the acts of one of the modern comedies, he will find that his chief entertainment has arisen from the actors totally abstracted from the author. The phrases, the sentiments, the fancies will appear to his reason very monotonous and in-

efficient, when separated from the grins of MUNDEN and the chatterings of FAWCETT. By degrees, he will imagine that these actors would make almost any phrases equally facetious. In short, he is very soon convinced, that the monosyllable *yes* is as admirable a piece of humour in MR. MUNDEN's mouth, as any other touch of rhetoric in modern comedy.

The authors know this as well as any body. The habit of recommending the most unmeaning dialogue with the most powerful expression is a great injury to the propriety, and ultimately to the judgment, of an actor; but it is of the greatest use to the dramatist, and accordingly his principal design in forming a character is to adapt it to that peculiar style of the actor, which the huge farces have rendered necessary to their existence. If there is a countryman, it must be adapted to EMERY; if an Irishman, to JOHNSTONE; if a gabbling humourist, it must be copied from nothing but the manner of FAWCETT. Not to mention therefore that all the countrymen, and

all the Irishmen, and all the gabbling humourists are alike, the author becomes a mere dependant on the player. The loss of LEWIS, for instance, whose gaiety of limb is of so much benefit to modern comedy, would be a perfect rheumatism to MR. REYNOLDS; and the loss of MUNDEN, who gives it such an agreeable variety of grin, would affect him little less than a lock-jaw.

It was this strange superiority of the mimetic over the literary part of the stage, of the organ in fact over it's inspirer, that determined me to criticise the actors. I intended at first to go through the entire list of both the theatres, and it was not till the tragic section had been printed, that I discovered the nameless multitude which this plan would have compelled me to individualize. I am sorry that I did not consider this objection sooner, as there are two or three essays under the head of tragedy, which I might have spared the reader. The second and third sections however are confined to those performers, whom I regarded

as the possessors of some exclusive originality. Somebody perhaps will still miss his favourite king or his favourite footman; but I have endeavoured to criticise those only who deserve applause, not those who merely obtain it. The work was written by starts and snatches in the midst of better subjects of meditation; but I was induced to continue it, partly by the originality of an enlarged criticism on the theatre, and principally by the hope of exciting an honourable ambition in the actors, who have hitherto been the subjects of mere scandal, or at best of the most partial levity. Criticism written with this levity serves merely to confirm the actor in a kind of hopelessness of respect. It cannot, I allow, be denied, that the profession of the stage has been brought into disgrace by the lives of it's members; but this very disgrace has become one cause of the moral negligence of actors: the social nature of their errors confounds the fault with it's power of pleasing; the foolish and dissipated are delighted to

find themselves at their ease in the company of the most public satirists, and thus the actors become indentified with the most contemptible men, whose habits they ridicule on the stage merely to practise with more familiar imitation in private.

As to the contempt that has been cast upon histrionic genius, it is not worthy an argument. If the knowledge of ourselves be the height of wisdom, is that art contemptible which conveys this knowledge to us in the most pleasing manner? If the actor is greatly inferior to the true dramatist, if he merely tells others what has been told himself, does the officer deserve no praise who issues the instructions of his general with accuracy, with spirit, with an ardour that shews he feels them? For my part, I have the greatest respect for an art which has been admired by the greatest critics ancient and modern, which HORACE did not think it beneath his genius to advise, ADDISON to recommend, and VOLTAIRE to practise, as well as protect. That genius cannot

be despicable in the eyes of the most ardent for fame, which without any thing to shew to posterity for it's reason, has handed down to us the memory of Æsop, Roscius, Baron, and Le Couvreur, and which will transmit to our descendants the names of Garrick, of Oldfield, and of Siddons. If such an art were divested of it's instruction, it would still be honourable for it's imitation of nature. It becomes mean, only when it degenerates into utter farce. Of a mere mimic indeed the praise seems to be little above that of an accomplished ape. Such an actor is confined to surfaces and externals; he possesses a kind of active acknowledgment of another's habits, that seems to exist in his powers of motion without any reference to the intellect: he imitates by this sympathy without the least pretensions to genius, just as musical instruments sound at the touch of corresponding keys. It is thus, that natives of New South Wales, who are the most stupid and untractable of mankind, mimic the personal peculiarities of the settlers to a fac-simile.

Much has been said of the immoral example of the characters and plays performed; but the managers, who are sometimes actors also, have always the power to remedy such an evil, by correcting their authors for representation; and it is in consideration of this duty, that I have felt the less scruple in recommending our old comedies to public performance. The managers certainly will not pretend too humble a respect for the authors, when they so often neglect the beauties as well as faults of our greatest writers for the utter deformity of the modern drama. And what is such a respect, when vice is it's object? If the genius of the play rests entirely upon it's immorality, it cannot be worth the performance; if it does not, how can a drama lose any of it's beauties, by the absence of the worst of faults? *

* Mr. Kemble might have reasoned a little in this manner, without any peculiar detriment to his originality or precision of thinking, when he revived Dryden's alteration of the *Tempest*.—See a criticism on this revival extracted from the News, in the Appendix to this work, p. 70.

In fact, the perpetual representation of these wretched dramas, which are called new without the least pretension to originality, is not only hurtful to the immediate reputation of the actors, but to their fame and memory with succeeding ages. An actor almost entirely depends upon the dramatist for his future name, he leaves nothing either to the eyes of posterity, like the poet and the painter, or to their ears, like the musician: even if his remembrance outlives his poet, it is little better than an Egyptian hieroglyphic, which the writer, who gave it meaning, has left nothing to explain. I do not a little regret therefore, that I have been compelled to draw examples of good acting from the worst dramas. The performer indeed never shews himself to more advantage than in giving brilliancy to dulness; but if he is always occupied with this task, he shares the danger of the manufacturer, who in polishing certain metals breathes an air that is his ultimate destruction.

Upon so perishable a subject, I cannot

enjoy the hope of talking to other times; it will be enough for me, if I do them any service by assisting the improvement of my own. It is this consideration that has always encouraged me to exercise my best powers, such as they are, against the barbarities of modern comedy. Succeeding ages very often acquire an unconscious tone from the most trifling exertions. Like the child who was awakened every morning by his father's flute, they rise in the calm possession of their powers, unconscious of the favourable impulse that has been given them.

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CRITICAL ESSAYS.

SECTION I.—TRAGEDY.

The drama is the most perfect imitation of human life; by means of the stage it represents man in all his varieties of mind, his expressions of manner, and his power of action, and is the first of moralities because it teaches us in the most impressive way the knowledge of ourselves. When it's lighter species, which professes to satirise, forsakes this imitation for caricature it becomes farce, whether it still be denominated *comedy*, as we say the *comedies of* Reynolds, or whether it be called opera, as we say the *operas* of Cherry and Cobb: the actors in these pieces must act unnaturally or they will do nothing, but in real comedy they will act naturally for the same reason. In the graver kind of drama however their imitation of life is perfect, not as it copies real and simple manners, but as it accords with our

habitual ideas of human character; those who have produced the general idea, that tragedy and comedy are equally direct imitations of human life, have mistaken their habitual for their experimental knowledge. The loftier persons of tragedy require an elevation of language and manner, which they never use in real life. Heroes and sages speak like other men, they use their action as carelessly and their looks as indifferently, and are not distinguished from their fellow-mortals by their personal but by their mental character; but the popular conception of a great man delights in dignifying his external habits, not only because great men are rarely seen and therefore acquire dignity from concealment, but because we conclude that they who excel us so highly in important points can have nothing unimportant about them. We can hardly persuade ourselves for instance, that SHAKSPEARE ever disputed in a club or that MILTON was fond of smoking: the ideas of greatness and insignificance associate with difficulty, and as extreme associations are seldom formed but by minds of peculiar fancy and vigourous thought, it is evident they will be rarely entertained by the majority of the world. A tragic hero, who called for his follower or his horse, would in real life call for him as easily and carelessly as any other man, but in

tragedy such a carelessness would become ludicrous: the loftiness of his character must be universal; an artist who would paint the battles of FREDERIC of Prussia in a series of pictures would study to maintain this important character throughout, he would not represent the chief sitting on horseback in a slovenly manner and taking snuff, though the snuff-box no doubt was of much importance at those times to his majesty, who as POPE says of PRINCE EUGENE, was as great a taker of snuff as of towns: so great a violence of contrast would become caricature in painting, and in tragedy it would degenerate into burlesque. Tragedy is an imitation of life in passions; it is comedy only which imitates both passions and habits.

A tragic actor then is to be estimated, not as he always copies nature, but as he satisfies the general opinion of life and manners. He must neither on the one hand debase his dignity by too natural a simplicity of manner, nor on the other give it a ridiculous elevation by pompousness and bombast. He cannot draw much of his knowledge from real life, because the loftier passions are rarely exhibited in the common intercourse of mankind; but nevertheless he should not indulge himself in novelties of invention, because the hearts of his audience will be able to judge where their experience has no power. Much study should

strengthen his judgment, since he must perfectly understand before he can feel his author and teach others to feel; where there is strong natural genius, judgment will usually follow in the developement of great passions, but it may fail in the minute proprieties of the stage: where there is not a strong natural genius, the contrary will be generally found. For the common actions of great characters he must study the manner of the stage, for their passions nothing but nature.

MR. KEMBLE.

Mr. Kemble is a peculiar instance of almost all these essentials to good acting, and at the same time an example how much they may be injured by an indiscriminate application of study. His conceptions of character are strong where the characters themselves are strong, his attention to passions is fixed by large objects, he cannot sufficiently study the minute where minuteness is important, though as I shall hereafter explain he can give importance to minutenesses that mean nothing. He appears to submit every thing to his judgment, and exhibits little of the enthusiasm of genius. The grander emotions are his chief study; he attaches a kind of loftiness to every sensation that he indulges, and thus conceives with much force the more majestic passions at the same time that he is raised above the pathetic passions, which always carry with them an air of weakness and humility.

For the expression of the loftier emotions no

actor is gifted by nature with greater external means. His figure though not elegant is manly and dignified, his features are strongly marked with what is called the Roman character, and his head altogether is the heroic head of the antiquary and the artist. This tragic form assumes excellently well the gait of royalty, the vigourous majesty of the warrior, and the profound gravity of the sage: but it's seriousness is unbending; his countenance seems to despise the gaiety it labours to assume, and it's comic expression is comic because it is singularly wretched. Of the passion of love he can express nothing; the reason is obvious; love from it's dependent nature must always, unless associated with some other passion, betray an expression of tender feebleness, and such an expression is unknown to MR. KEMBLE's countenance. The attempt of MRS. INCHBALD* to make MR. KEMBLE a lover is more honourable to her partiality for the friend than to her affection for just criticism. She says, that he can paint love more vigourously than any other man, though he cannot love *moderately:* in her opinion, "sighs, soft complainings, a plaintive voice, and tender looks bespeak mere moderation; MR. KEMBLE," she continues, "must be struck

* New British Theatre with critical remarks by Mrs. Inchbald; No. 3. Longman and Rees.

to the heart's core, or not at all: he must be wounded to the soul with grief, despair, or madness." But this is mistaking the associated passion for it's companion. What a lover is he who can neither speak softly nor look tenderly? No man according to this idea can express a perfect love, that is, a love opposed to *mere moderation*, unless he is struck with grief, or desperate, or mad: but by such an association of outrageous passions the expression of the individual one will not be a perfect, because it is not a simple expression: the actor who cannot express an individual passion without the assistance of others can no more be said to be master of that passion, than a singer can be called a master of his art who cannot sing without an accompaniment.

It is in characters that are occupied with themselves and with their own importance, it is in the systematic and exquisite revenge of *Zanga*, in the indignant jealousy of *Othello*, and in the desperate ambition of *King John*, that MR. KEMBLE is the actor. There is always something sublime in the sudden completion of great objects, and perhaps there is not a sublimer action on the stage than the stride of MR. KEMBLE as *Zanga*, over the body of his victim, and his majestic exultation of revenge.

But if he succeeds in the prouder passions, his

diligence of study has given him no less success in the expression of impressive seriousness.

The character of *Penruddock* in *The Wheel of Fortune* is his greatest performance, and I believe it to be a perfect one. It is admirable, not because the tenderness of his love, as MRS. INCHBALD tells us, "appears beneath the roughest manners," but because the very defect which hurts his general style of acting, that studious and important preciseness, which is affectation in all his other characters, contributes to the strength, to the nature of *Penruddock*. Those who can discern any peculiar expression of tenderness under the roughness of MR. KEMBLE'S acting mistake their feelings for their observation: it is the tenderness the character is supposed to feel, not what he actually exhibits, it is the tenderness of the author not of the actor, which they discern if there are one or two phrases of tenderness uttered by the stern recluse, they have a pathetic effect not because they are expressed with peculiar tenderness by the actor, but because a soft emotion so unexpected in one of his appearance produces a strong effect from the strength of contrast. To give a man imaginary praise is to give him real dispraise. MR. KEMBLE himself would never think of valuing his own performance for its tenderness of expression; he would value it, and

with justice, for it's severity of expression, for it's display of external philosophy, and for it's contempt of every thing that can no longer amuse.

Wherever this air of self-importance or abstraction is required, MR. KEMBLE is excellent. It is no small praise to say of an actor that he excels in soliloquies: these solitary discourses require great judgment because the speaker has no assistance from others, and because the audience, always awake to action, is inclined during a soliloquy to seek repose in inattention. Indeed to gain the attention of an audience is always in some degree to gain their applause, and this applause must cheerfully be given to MR. KEMBLE, who by his busy air and impressive manner always attaches importance to a speech of whatever interest or length. To this excellence in particular and to the general action of the stage he contributes by an exact knowledge of every stage artifice local and temporal, and I could not but admire the judicious contrivance by which he added a considerable interest to his first appearance in the season of 1805; the curtain rose and discovered a study; it was adorned with the most natural literary disorder possible: the grave actor appeared writing at a table with open books here and there about him; the globes, the library, the furniture, every thing had it's use, and

no doubt it's effect, for an audience, though perhaps insensibly, is always pleased with a natural scene. Of another necessary stage artifice, which is called *bye-play*, and which beguiles the intervals of action by an air of perpetual occupation, he is a perfect master; he never stands feebly inactive, waiting for his turn to speak; he is never out of his place, he attends to every thing passing on the stage at once, nor does he indulge himself in those complacent stares at the audience which occupy inferior actors.*

This attention to the minute however is often employed needlessly; he has made it a study hardly less important than that of the passions, and hence arises the great fault of his acting, a laborious and almost universal preciseness. Some of the instances of this fault are so ludicrous that a person who had not seen him would scarcely credit the relation: he sometimes turns from one object to another with so cautious a circumflexion of head, that he is no doubt very often pitied by the audience for having a stiff neck; his words now and then follow one another so slowly and his face all the while assumes so methodical an expression, that he seems reckoning how many lines he has learnt by heart; I have known him make an eternal groan upon the interjection *Oh!*, as if he were

* See Appendix.

determined to shew that his misery had not affected his lungs; and to represent an energetical address he has kept so continual a jerking and nodding of the head, that at last if he represented any thing at all, it could be nothing but Saint Vitus's dance: by this study of nonentities it would appear, that he never pulls out his handkerchief without a design upon the audience, that he has as much thought in making a step as making a speech, in short that his very finger is eloquent and that nothing means something. But all this neither delights nor deceives the audience: of an assembly collected together to enjoy a rational entertainment, the majority will always be displeased with what is irrational though they may be unable to describe their sensations critically: irrationalities amuse in farce only. An audience when judging the common imitations of life have merely to say "Is it like ourselves!"

Perhaps there is not a greater instance of the ill effects one bad habit, like this, can produce, than in MR. KEMBLE's delivery. No actor in his declamation pleases more at some times or more offends at others. His voice is hollow and monotonous from a malformation, as it is said, of his organs of utterance: it's weakness cannot command a variety of sound sufficiently powerful for all occasions, nor is it's natural extent melodious

or pleasing; but a voice naturally monotonous must be distinguished from a monotony of delivery; the latter neglects emphasis and expression, the former though it will not always obtain may always attempt both. No player perhaps understands his author better, and such a knowledge will easily impart itself to others: his declamation therefore is confident and exact, he is at all times carefully distinct, and his general delivery is marked, expressive, and even powerful: the art with which he supplies the natural weakness of his voice by an energy and significancy of utterance is truly admirable. But the same affectation, which indulges itself in an indiscriminate importance of manner, the same ambition of originality where originality is least wanted, characterises MR. KEMBLE's pronunciation: it has induced him to defy all orthoepy and to allow no accent but what pleases his caprice or his love of innovation.* To be novel for the mere sake of novelty belongs neither to genius nor to judgment. MR. KEMBLE insists that the word *rode* should be *rod*, *beard* is metamorphorsed into *bird*, he never *pierces* the heart but *purses* it, and *virtue* and *merchant* become in the dialect of the kitchen *varchue* and *marchant;* the strong syllable *er*

* See Appendix.

appears to be an abomination, and is never allowed utterance; POPE says

To err is human, to forgive divine—

but MR. KEMBLE will not consent to this, he says

To air is human—

making the moralist say, that it is the nature of man to dry his clean shirt or to take a walk: *thy* is changed into *thĕ* probably because the sound of *mȳ* is sometimes contracted into *mĕ*; but mutabilities of pronunciation in one word never argue for them in another; people are not accustomed to say, such a man has a *wrĕ* neck, or that it is very *drĕ* weather. DR. JOHNSON who had an antipathy to the short pronunciation *wĭnd* and wished to call it *wīnd*, attacked the custom by a ludicrous assemblage and mispronunciation of other words, in which the letter *i* is naturally long, and said with much critical gravity,—"*I have a mĭnd to fĭnd why you call that wĭnd.*" But this pleasantry did not change the pronunciation in general converse. Let us see how MR. KEMBLE would improve the following lines: we will put his improvement, after the original, since the beauty of the contrast will be greater:

Virtue, thy happy wisdom's known
In making what we wish our own;
Nay, e'en to wish what wishes thee
Imparts the blest reality:
For since the soul that pierces mine,
Sweet Myra's soul, is full of thine,
In my breast too thy spirit stirs,
Since all my soul is full of her's!

MR. KEMBLE'S improvement:

Varchue, the happy wisdom's known
In making what we wish our own;
Nay, e'en to wish what wishes thee
Imparts the blest reality:
For since the soul that *purses* mine,
Sweet Myra's soul, is full of thine,
In my breast too thy spirit *stares*,
Since all my soul is full of *hairs!*

This is very amusing, but there is no rule for pronunciation but custom; as customs change, actors may change; but no individual should alter what he has no reason for altering, or what has either a bad effect or none at all when altered. There have been several attempts to vary the mode of spelling now in use; the latest innovation was practised by RITSON, a man of curious and happy research into old English literature, and one who might have boasted a better originality than that of making his words unintelligi-

ble: nobody has adopted a single one of these innovations, first because it is painful to depart from old rules and habits, and secondly, because it is still more painful to depart from them without a cause. For the same reasons nobody will adopt MR. KEMBLE's pronunciations, and if he were to carry his dialect into private life, he would be either pitied or laughed at. But why place his ambition where there are no hopes of original praise? I could mispronounce much better than he, when I was a mere infant.

Upon the whole MR. KEMBLE appears to be an actor of correct rather than quick conception, of studious rather than universal or equal judgment, of powers some naturally defective but admirably improved and others excellent by nature but still more so by art; in short of a genius more compulsive of respect than attractive of delight. He does not present one the idea of a man who grasps with the force of genius, but of one who overcomes by the toil of attention. He never rises and sinks as in the enthusiasm of the moment; his ascension though grand is careful, and when he sinks it is with preparation and dignity. There are actors who may occasionally please more, but not one who is paid a more universal or profound attention.

MRS. SIDDONS.

To write a criticism on MRS. SIDDONS is to write a panegyric, and a panegyric of a very peculiar sort, for the praise will be true. Like her elder brother she has a marked and noble countenance and a figure more dignified than graceful, and she is like him in all his good qualities but not any of his bad ones. If MR. KEMBLE studiously meditates a step or an attitude in the midst of passion, MRS. SIDDONS never thinks about either and therefore is always natural, because on occasions of great feeling it is the passions should influence the actions: attitudes are not to be studied, as old HAVARD used to study them, between six looking-glasses: feel the passion, and the action will follow. I know, it has been denied, that actors sympathize with the feelings they represent, and among other critics, DR. JOHNSON is supposed to have denied it. The Doctor was accustomed to talk very loudly at the play upon divers subjects, even when his friend

GARRICK was electrifying the house with his most wonderful scenes, and the worst of it was that he usually sat in one of the stage boxes: the actor remonstrated with him one night after the representation, and complained that the talking "disturbed his feelings:" "*Phsaw! David,*" replied the critic, "*Punch has no feelings.*" But the Doctor was fond of saying his good things as well as lesser geniuses, and to say a good thing is not always to say a true one or one that is intended to be true. To call his friend a puppet, to give so contemptuous an appellation to a man whose powers he was at other times happy to respect, and whose death he lamented as having "eclipsed the gaiety of nations," must be considered as a familiar pleasantry rather than a betrayed opinion. The best way to solve the difficulty is to apply to an actor himself, but as I am not in the way of such an application, I think the complaint made by GARRICK will do as well; since he talks of his feelings, as the means necessary to his performance. It appears to me, that the countenance cannot express a single passion perfectly, unless the passion is first felt: it is easy to grin representations of joy, and to pull down the muscles of the countenance as an imitation of sorrow, but a keen observer of human nature and it's effects will easily detect the cheat; there are nerves and muscles requisite

Leigh Hunt's Critical Essays 1807

to expression, that will not answer the will on common occasions; but to represent a passion with truth, every nerve and muscle should be in it's proper action, or the representation becomes weak and confused, melancholy is mistaken for grief, and pleasure for delight: it is from this feebleness of emotion so many dull actors endeavour to supply passion with vehemence of action and voice, as jugglers are talkative and bustling to beguile scrutiny. I have somewhere heard, that MRS. SIDDONS has talked of the real agitation which the performance of some of her characters has made her feel.

To see the bewildered melancholy of *Lady Macbeth* walking in her sleep, or the widow's mute stare of perfected misery by the corpse of the gamester *Beverley*, two of the sublimest pieces of acting on the English stage, would argue this point better than a thousand critics. MRS. SIDDONS has the air of never being the actress; she seems unconscious that there is a motley croud called a pit waiting to applaud her, or that there are a dozen fiddlers waiting for her exit. This is always one of the marks of a great actor: the player who amuses himself by looking at the audience for admiration may be assured he never gets any: it is in acting as in conferring obligations: one should have the air of doing nothing for a return.

If MRS. SIDDONS has not every single requisite to a perfect tragedian, it is the amatory pathetic: in the despair of *Belvidera* for instance she rises to sublimity, but in the tenderness of *Belvidera* she preserves too stately and self-subdued an air: she can overpower, astonish, afflict, but she cannot win: her majestic presence and commanding features seem to disregard love, as a trifle to which they cannot descend. But it does not follow, that a tragedian unable to sink into the softness of the tender passion, is the more to be respected for his undeviating dignity and spirit: it does not follow that he has a loftier genius; love though humble never moves our contempt; on the contrary it adds new interest to a character at other times dignified: in real life the greatest heroes and sages have acquired an extraordinary charm from their union of wisdom and tenderness, of conquest and gallant submission: and as we doubly admire the wise PLATO for his amatory effusions and the chivalrous spirit of HENRY the GREAT for the tenderness of his love, so on the stage the tragedian, who unites the hero and the lover, that is, who can display either character as it is required, is the more admirable genius. Besides, the figure of MRS. SIDDONS is now too large and too matronly to represent youth, and particularly the immediate passions of youth;

we hope that by the next season she will have given up the performance of characters suited neither to her age nor her abilities.

After this one defect I have in vain considered and reconsidered all the tragedies, in which I have seen her, to find the shadow of another. She unites with her noble conceptions of nature every advantage of art, every knowledge of stage propriety and effect. This knowledge however she displays not with the pompous minuteness of MR. KEMBLE, but with that natural carelessness, which shews it to be the result of genius rather than grave study. If there is a gesture in the midst, or an attitude in the interval of action, it is the result of the impassioned moment; one can hardly imagine, there has been any such thing as a rehearsal for powers so natural and so spirited. Of the force of such mere action I recollect a sublime instance displayed by MRS. SIDDONS in the insipid tragedy of *The Grecian Daughter.** This heroine has obtained for her aged and imprisoned father some unexpected assistance from the guard *Philotas:* transported with gratitude, but having nothing from the poet to give expression to her feelings, she starts with extended arms and casts herself in mute prostration at his feet. I shall

* See Appendix.

never forget the glow, which rushed to my cheeks at this sublime action.

These are the effects Mr. KEMBLE should study, and not the clap-provoking frivolities of ending every speech with an energetic dash of the fist, or of running off the stage after a vehement declamation as if the actor was in haste to get his pint of wine. If the brother and sister are compared, the palm both of genius and of judgment must undoubtedly be given to MRS. SIDDONS: I question whether she understands her authors so intimately, but she gives double effect to their important passages, and their unimportant ones are allowed to sink into their proper mediocrity: where every thing is raised into significance, the significance is destroyed. If an artist would study the expression of the passions, let him lay by the pictures of LE BRUN, and copy the looks of MRS. SIDDONS.

MR. POPE.

When I place Mr. Pope immediately after Mrs. Siddons, every body will see I do not criticise the actors according to their rank. But it is for the sake of contrast. If we have just had an example of almost perfect tragedy, we have now an instance of every fault that can make it not only imperfect but disgusting. Mr. Pope has not one requisite to an actor, but a good voice, and this he uses so unmercifully on all occasions, that it's value is lost, and he contrives to turn it into a defect. His face is as hard, as immoveable, and as void of meaning as an oak wainscot, his eyes which should endeavour to throw some meaning into his vociferous declamation he generally contrives to keep almost shut, and what would make another actor merely serious is enough to put him in a passion. In short, when Shakspeare wrote his description of "a robustious fellow, who tears a passion to tatters," one would suppose that he had been shewn by some supernatural

means the future race of actors, as *Macbeth* had a prophetic view of Banquo's race, and that the robustious phantom was MR. POPE. Here is an actor then without face, expression, or delivery, and yet this complication of negative qualities finds means to be clapped in the theatre and panegyrized in the newspapers. This inconsistency must be explained. As to the newspapers,* and their praise of this gentleman, I do not wish to repeat all the prevailing stories. Who does not know their corruptions? There is however an infallible method of obtaining a clap from the galleries, and there is an art known at the theatre by the name of *clap-trapping*, which MR. POPE has shewn great wisdom in studying. It consists in nothing more, that in gradually raising the voice as the speech draws to a conclusion, making an alarming outcry on the last four or five lines, or suddenly dropping them into a tremulous but energetic under-tone, and with a vigorous jerk of the right arm rushing off the stage. All this astonishes the galleries; they are persuaded it must be something very fine, because it is so important and so unintelligible, and they clap for the sake of their own reputation.

One might be apt to wonder at MR. POPE's total want of various expression, when his merit

* See Appendix.

as an artist is considered. It should seem, that the same imitative observation, which gives so natural an elegance to his portraits on canvass, should enliven and adorn his portraits on the stage, that the same elegant conception which enables him to throw grace into the attitudes and meaning into the eyes of others, should inspire his action with variety and his looks with intelligence.

It is in the acknowledgment of gesture and attitude, but more particularly in the variation of countenance, in the adaption of look to feeling, that the actor is best known. MR. POPE, in his general style, has but two gestures, which follow each other in monotonous alternation, like the jerks of a toyshop harlequin: one is a mere extension of the arms, and is used on all occasions of candour, of acknowledgment, of remonstrance, and of explanation; the other for occasions of vehemence or of grandeur, is an elevation of the arms, like the gesture of RAPHAEL'S *Saint Paul preaching at Athens*, an action which becomes the more absurd on common occasions, from it's real sublimity. If MR. POPE however is confined to two expressions in his gesture, he has but two expressions in his look, a flat indifference which is used on all sober occasions, and an angry frown which is used on all impassioned ones. With these two looks he

undertakes to represent all the passions, gentle as well as violent; he is like a quack who with a phial in each hand undertakes to perform every possible wonder, while the only thing to be wondered at is his cheating the mob. The best character he performs is *Othello*, because he performs it in a mask: for when an actor's face is not exactly seen, an audience is content to supply by its own imagination the want of expression, just as in reading a book we figure to ourselves the countenance of the persons interested. But when we are presented with the real countenance, we are disappointed if our imagination is not assisted in its turn; the picture presented to our eyes should animate the picture presented to our mind; if either of them differ, or if the former is less lively than the latter, a sensation of discord is produced, and destroys the effect of nature which is always harmonious.

The pain we feel at bad acting seems indeed to be entirely the result of a want of harmony. We are pleased when the actor's external action corresponds with the action of his mind, when his eye answers his heart, when all we see is the animated picture of all we feel: we are displeased whenever the passion and the expression are at variance, when the countenance does not become a second language to the dialogue, when moderate tones

express vehement emotions and when vehement tones express moderate emotions, when in short MR. POPE is not *Rolla* or *Romeo* but MR. POPE. A musician who tells us that he is going to play a melancholy movement and then dashes his harp or his piano in a fury cannot disappoint us more than this actor, when he raises from language merely sorrowful an expression of boisterous passion. The character of *Hotspur* has been reckoned a proper one for MR. POPE, because it is loud and violent; these are good reasons certainly, and we would rather hear him in *Hotspur* than in *Hamlet*, for noise like any other enjoyment is delightful in its proper season only. But to act *Hotspur* well is a mark of no great talent; of all expressions violence is the most easily affected, because the conception of violence has no sensation of restraint, it has no feelings to hide or to repress, and no niceties of action to study; the gentler passions give us leisure to examine them, we can follow every variation of feeling and every change of expression; but here we have leisure for nothing; every thing is rapid and confused; we are in the condition of a man who should attempt to count the spokes of a wheel in a chariot-race.

MR. POPE in short may be considered as an example of the little value of a good voice unac-

companied with expression, while MR. KEMBLE is a proof how much may be done by an expressive countenance and manner with the worst voice in the world.

But perhaps as I can say nothing of MR. POPE as a tragic actor, I may be expected to say something of him as a comic one, for he does act in comedy. Any one however who examines this double gift, will discover that to act in comedy and to be a comic actor are two very different things; MR. KEMBLE performs in comedy, but who will call MR. KEMBLE a comic actor? Who will reckon up the comic actors and say "We have BANNISTER, and LEWIS, and MUNDEN, and KEMBLE?" If MR. POPE acts in sentimental comedy, what is called sentimental comedy is nothing more than a mixture of tragedy and comedy, or, if DR. JOHNSON's definition is to be allowed, it is sometimes entire tragedy, for he calls tragedy "a dramatic representation of a serious action." There may be very often a serious character in humourous comedies, such as a sober merchant, a careful father, or one of those useless useful friends who serve as a kind of foil to a gay hero, but the actor who performs these characters never excites our livelier feelings or our mirth, and therefore cannot be called a comic actor. *Lord Townley* for instance in *The Pro-*

roked Husband is merely a tragic character who has stepped into comedy: MR. KEMBLE represents *Lord Townley* with much gravity and stateliness; yet nobody in the pit ever said at seeing this character "Really that is very comic!" It is necessary to a comic actor, that he should be able to excite our laughter or at least our smiles, but MR. POPE never excites either, at any rate not designedly. It is for this reason that he has been placed among the tragedians, and that MR. CHARLES KEMBLE, MR. HENRY JOHNSTON, MR. MURRAY, and MR. SIDDONS will be placed among them too. All these gentlemen might undoubtedly be called comic actors, as Robin Hood's companion who was seven feet high was called Little John; or we might say such a man was as comic as Mr. KEMBLE or MR. HENRY JOHNSTON, just as we say such a thing is as smooth as a file. But upon plain subjects I would rather be plain spoken.

MR. RAYMOND.

INTEREST has it's sway in the mimic as well as in the real world; crowns of gold and crowns of tinsel, salaries of two guineas a week and salaries of twenty thousand a year, are alike bestowed by interest; those who all their lives are kings over mighty realms and those who for two or three hours reign over thirty square feet of board must alike be courted; but the favourites of either do not always support the characters that are given them, wretched things will be said and done in the houses, nor will the people always be satisfied with that for which they pay. It must be a singular possession of interest that can elevate MRS. HUMPHRIES and MISS BRUNTON into heroines, and it must be a great want of interest that brings down MR. RAYMOND to be the mere *Achates* of heroes or the insipid serious old gentleman of the sentimental drama.

The person and the countenance of MR. RAY-

MOND possess little of tragic dignity. THOMSON the poet was of a dull appearance and

> More fat than bard beseems,

and MR. RAYMOND is more heavy in his look than tragedian beseems; yet the face of THOMSON would become highly animated at *poetical* times, and the countenance of MR. RAYMOND in scenes of interest can flash into expressions peculiar to the man of feeling and genius. He is not however a tragedian of the highest class, since his chief excellence is in the vehement passions; but in these he is always natural: his anger is not the unmeaning rage of MR. POPE, it does not consist in a mere staring eye and a thundering voice, nor is his violent grief the sullen and boisterous lamentation of a schoolboy; those who have seen him in the character of *Macduff* have seen a picture of the strong pathetic that cannot be surpassed. Every body can clench his fist, can sob, and can strike his bosom every other minute; but to change the voice and the countenance into all the transitions from desperate to languid sorrow, or from resentment of wrongs to piteous complaint, and gradually to become vehement or gentle, powerful or powerless, as the passion fluctuates, belongs to a master

only. It is not in simple passions, but in their gradations and changes that the actor is most admirable.

Mr. Raymond should pass over to Covent Garden Theatre and be installed in all the characters of Mr. Pope. While the latter is attempting *Pizarro*, a character which he cannot reach, the former condescends to be the magician of an Eastern tale and is assisting pantomime. Here should be a mutual exchange; Mr. Pope indeed as a pantomimist could make no use of his great excellence his voice, but then he can start and stamp better than most actors, and with the usual help of expressive music and an explanatory printed flag would possess quite sufficient meaning for a knight of romance or a protector of Harlequins. But Mr. Raymond's person is not sufficiently active for the bustle of pantomime, he does not enter into the fancies of attitude with that delightful no-meaning, which becomes so fascinating in the limbs of an opera-dancer, nor can he help reminding us of the tragedian, a fault of which Mr. Pope is never guilty.

I have been repeatedly struck in the examination of actors on the stage with an idea, which may at first sight appear fanciful enough, but which has always given me the strongest convic-

tion of it's truth, if not perhaps from abstract reasoning, at least from internal evidence. MR. RAYMOND is well known to the public as a literary man, or from mere stage observation I should have hazarded the conjecture that he was a man of reading.

There is an inexpressible something, which in common life always announces the gentleman, and which never deceives us: it appears to me, that there is also an air not to be described which in some actors announces the man of reading. Whether it is a peculiar confidence that does not exhibit itself too strongly, whether it is an unembarrassed intimacy with the author's language, or whether it is an air of mental polish that shines through external habits, I have not yet studied to discover: perhaps the latter reason is the most natural, for MR. COOKE, though he perfectly understands his author and though a strong original genius, has nothing of this air, nor should I suppose him to be a man of reading. If I were asked to mention those who strike me peculiarly with their literary air, I should venture to name MR. ELLISTON, MR. KEMBLE, MR. CHARLES KEMBLE, MR. RAYMOND, and even MR. HENRY SIDDONS, who proves by the bye that this air is not the result of an easy confidence.

MR. HENRY SIDDONS.

SITUATIONS in life are determined sometimes by genius, but much oftener by chance. Some men become clergymen for no other reason than because their fathers were clergymen; the inspiration of heaven is a living in the family: others scrape a fiddle all their lives because they are the offspring of musicians: one inherits a goosequill from his father though he has nothing to do with his genius, and another calls himself doctor and murders the human race because his father did all he could to keep them alive. Thus if the subject of my present criticism had not been the son of MRS. SIDDONS, I cannot imagine he would ever have chosen the stage for his profession.

The countenance of MR. SIDDONS is sensible, but his person is ungraceful, and his manners are constrained; his voice is worse than MR. KEMBLE'S, for it is harsh as well as feeble, nor can he manage it with the least skill. There is a word very much used by newspapers, when they wish to

conceal their dissatisfaction with an actor under the mask of praise: if a performer is insipid and does nothing towards the advancement of the performance, they say he is *respectable;* this word is peculiarly applicable to the general merits of MR. SIDDONS. His delivery is that of a man who has studied the words with attention in order *to say his part well;* it is that of a school-boy repeating Homer; he may possess a taste for what he is reciting, but the anxiety of the recitation destroys the idea of every thing else but itself: he cannot attend to action and to passion, and therefore they are both feeble. But if he does not move his audience with delight, he never moves them with contempt; he is always *respectable*, his passion though feeble is never misplaced, his theatrical birth and his early theatrical habits prevent him from gross mistakes, and he has the air of feeling an interest in the passing scene, an air which will always keep an audience good-natured even when they have every other reason to be indifferent.

MR. SIDDONS should never appear in any character, which is necessary to the importance of a drama: to make him a hero and a king is to make a hero without spirit and a king without dignity: kings indeed are not always dignified off the stage, for the late KING of NAPLES used to smoke with his lazzaroni, GEORGE the SECOND

was fond of kicking his ministers, and CHARLES the TWELFTH combed his hair with his fingers, though this is a circumstance disputed by his friends, who contend that he never combed it at all; but there are a great many good reasons why kings should be dignified on the stage, and as authors always make them so, actors should not degrade their dignity. MR. SIDDONS is *respectable*, and he should undertake characters that inspire us with nothing more than respect; but what do the newspapers mean when they say such an actor performs Hamlet or Henry the Fourth's Prince of Wales *respectably?* To represent such men *respectably* is to represent them badly, for they should excite warmer emotions, they should raise our wonder and our admiration. If we praise HENRY the FIFTH so highly as to call him a *respectable hero*, it will not be a great hazard of epithet to call SIR ISAAC NEWTON a *knowing mathematician*, or LOCKE a *clever sage*.

MR. HENRY JOHNSTON.

If Mr. Siddons hurts the propriety of a dignified character by a want of importance, Mr. Henry Johnston hurts it by an important affectation; the fault however is not equally hurtful, since great characters may be proud and affected, but they should never be unimportant: a little stride and frown may be allowed a theatrical hero, but he should never shuffle in his pace or look as if he were saying a lesson. Mr. Johnston however is invariably too lofty, his mien becomes haughty when it should merely be stedfast, and as he possesses a very expressive countenance and a commanding figure this haughtiness has an effect peculiarly observable.

He who is always upon stilts will not make a great progress, he can neither stoop as occasion requires, nor change his attitude and his manner with an easy and necessary variety.

Perhaps it was a misfortune for Mr. Johnston, that in his younger days he was so much ap-

plauded in theatres where he could neither learn from better actors nor from impartial critics: the northern stage, filled with wretched players, was rejoiced to discover a promising genius in the young actor, he was dignified by the title of the Scotch Roscius, and from that moment his applause was unbounded and his errors unalterable. It is natural enough that a young genius full of himself should take no care to correct what every body conspires to praise; where there is no discrimination of praise there will be no self-discrimination of error; as every thing pleases, it is naturally supposed every thing ought to please, and thus bad habits are fixed, and criticism if ever it changes it's tone will no longer be able to change it's effect. MR. JOHNSTON has therefore retained all the errors which though tolerated and even applauded in the child become intolerable in the man.

A young actor whose feelings and whose experience allow him little knowledge of mankind has very general ideas of passion; he conceives nothing but the stronger passions because they are the least complicated, and he expresses them with the more ease as they require uncomplicated expression; the features easily assume the look of rage and of pride, because these are passions which are totally occupied with themselves, and therefore exhibit

themselves individually; envy and jealousy on the contrary being mixed passions exhibit themselves in complication with others, and are more difficult of representation, just as it is more difficult in a picture to mingle hues delicately than to make it of one colour. The stronger passions are easier also of expression, because they are seen almost as much in the action as in the countenance, while melancholy, pity, and love are confined almost entirely to the latter. A youthful actor therefore, finding his powers best suited to the stronger passions, indulges himself in that vehement expression with which children always endeavour to supply the man; passions really existing moderate their violence by their own failure of power, but in imitation no such self-restraint is felt, and therefore in unskilful hands their violence is always carried beyond nature: thus children are inclined to caricature a passion, because they must supply the deficiency of feeling by a superfluity of action; every thing becomes greater in the imitation than in the original; dignity is forced into haughtiness, displeasure into rage, and indifference into contempt.

These are the boyish defects MR. JOHNSTON has neglected to overcome. Unassisted by that penetrating and powerful genius, whose nature it is to discern it's own errors and to break through

them by it's own reason, he has wanted a skilful master, who might have retrenched his fancy and added to his judgment. He has therefore become a man of habits, and introduces them upon all occasions without the least reason. Thus he has always an air of importance, and it is always the same air whether he is a warrior, a lover, or a mere gentleman. He indulges himself in all the mute cant of the stage, he rolls his eyes, frowns most terrifically, looks downwards on one side with a swelling front and in an attitude of stiff contempt, prepares us for every trifling speech with cold pauses of intended meaning, and even descends to the knack of frequently tossing a lock off his forehead with a delicate finger, like a young lady whose curls disturb her eyes.

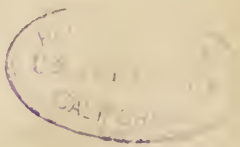
All these frivolities, which seem to be the effect of a studious habit, are in reality the consequence of a negligent habit; they are to supply expression and nature, which are studied with difficulty, and they are to win the audience by personal graces which are easier of assumption than mental graces. But these tricks lose their effect by repetition, because every body expects them; his frowns are contemplated with the most perfect coolness, the audience are on their guard and do not chuse to be alarmed without a cause; his haughty attitudes indeed sometimes make them

wonder, but the wonder is, what those attitudes can mean; they are sometimes alarmed too at his rolling eyes, but I can assure him from my own experience that it is only lest he should overstrain his eyeballs. In pantomime, which deals in astonishment, it may be necessary to be horrible in order to please, but MR. JOHNSTON should divest himself of pantomime when he puts on the tragedian: dignity has a serene not a disturbed countenance, it is not necessary for kings and heroes to have scowling foreheads, nor for a man to look like a tyger in order to look sensible.

MR. JOHNSTON wants study: he has every external qualification for a tragedian, and his genius I believe to be equal to twice it's present efforts. He sometimes displays a powerful passion with the manner and countenance of a noble tragedian; but this is by happy starts, when his genius gets the better of his habits. Those who have seen him in the Tale of Mystery will not easily forget his vigourous picture of a conscience yielding to the past and struggling with the future. There is not indeed a vehement character which with the proper study he might not attain, but it requires a greater genius united with persevering powers of study to comprehend one character which he has attempted, and which is the most difficult in the English drama, because it abounds

beyond all others in combinations of passion. It must be the praise of a man, who shall possess a genius capable of more than the art of acting, to personate Hamlet, the gallant, the philosophical, the melancholy Hamlet, that amiable inconsistent, who talked when he should have acted and acted when he should not even have talked, who with a bosom wrung with sensibility was unfeeling, and in his very passion for justice unjust, who in his misery had leisure for ridicule and in his revenge for benevolence, who in the most melancholy abstraction never lost the graces of mind or the elegancies of manner, natural in the midst of artifice and estimable in the midst of error. But let me not attempt to describe the indescribable.

In all his studies MR. JOHNSTON should never attempt the gay gentleman of comedy. His air is always tragic, and when he affects the coxcomb or the lady's man his habitual importance seems to despise the character he is assuming.



MR. MURRAY.

There is a genius for small things as well as great: it is the genius of some men to astonish and of others to keep us composed; one man raises our admiration by wandering in a brilliant eccentricity, is always active, is always new; another maintains our respect by pursuing a steady line, he never errs and never amazes, he is looked upon with complacency and followed with confidence. The genius of Mr. Murray is a correct mediocrity, and in his proper characters, which he seldom forsakes, he is natural and impressive. His person is not elegant nor is his countenance animated, but his manner is altogether interesting, and neither elegance of shape nor vivacity of feature are necessary to that kind of fatherly character, which it is his peculiar happiness to exhibit. Conscious of a want of vigourous powers he represents to most advantage the mild seriousness of declining life and the pathetic feebleness of old age: there is no actor who could give a truer

picture of the faithful old steward in the comedy of As You Like It. It may seem singular enough, that to exemplify the good performance of a tragedian I instance his performance in comedy; but I repeat, that a man is not a comedian because he may chance to act a serious character in comedy; he is like a grave personage in a company of jovial spirits; he neither laughs himself nor makes others laugh, and therefore he is no jovial spirit though every body around him roars with merriment.

Of such an actor as MR. MURRAY there is not much to write: things of one figure or of one use are easily described; a geometrician shall be a long time in drawing a polygon, but he will describe a circle in a moment.

I will merely advise MR. MURRAY never to attempt the character of Manly in the Provoked Husband: it is indeed somewhat serious and philosophical, but it is also cheerful and elegant, and requires a more youthful air than MR. MURRAY can assume.

MRS. POWELL.

CRITICS are without doubt the most unpolite beings upon earth; they have no more tenderness for the faults of ladies than of gentlemen, arguing very singularly that if ladies chuse to become public characters they must endure public examination and sometimes public reproof; they say curiously enough, that their peace is not to be disturbed merely because a writer is called Mistress instead of Mister, and that they cannot be delighted even though it is an actress that plays badly and not an actor. All this is very shocking and ungallant, but then it would be more shocking if these ladies were to lose their wits for want of a little rational advice.

What honest critic for instance could refrain from giving MRS. POWELL some advice on her frequent whim of assuming the character of Hamlet? I have heard indeed of females, whom the vapours have induced to imagine themselves tea-pots; others have bewailed their transformation

into pincushions, shuddering whenever they saw a needle or a bodkin; and there was a lady in MR. POPE'S time who insisted she was a goose-pye and was ready to fall into fits at the sight of a bishop or an alderman: but we never before knew an instance of a female, who imagined herself so thoroughly a man in habits and in experience, as to be able to represent the most difficult picture of man on the stage.

It is at all times unpleasant to see a woman performing in the dress of a man even without his character, and authors had better avoid the introduction of such a sight as much as possible: the idea of a female following a man without discovery in the habit of a page, which is the character generally given her, is at least improbable, and the manners of women in the dress of the other sex are rendered aukward by the strange sensation of novelty it must produce in their minds. Actresses are not famous for their bashfulness of deportment, their public exposure will not allow so retiring a quality; but they need not take pains to render this confidence disgusting. It was the opinion of TASSONI,* the inventor of mock-heroic poetry, that women introduced the custom of wearing gowns to conceal their deformities of

* See Appendix.

shape; but if any reason at all can be given for the custom, I should rather think it was to heighten the beauties, that really existed, by adorning them with modesty. Mystery always increases admiration. Why is it that a lady's ankle is more admired than a gentleman's? Not because it is more beautiful, but because it so seldom peeps from it's hiding-place.

But how can MRS. POWELL expect to represent men with truth, when she is obliged to copy women even at second hand? She does not study the female of the author, but that of MRS. SIDDONS: nature and MRS. SIDDONS are indeed much alike, but we should never study a copy when we can study the original. I am persuaded that MRS. POWELL is suffered to act the heroine in tragedy, merely because the managers of Drury Lane theatre have not a single tragic actress. Her conception of character has no boldness of fancy, and therefore her expression has neither prominence nor variety: like all inferior players she can express none of the combinations of passion, her grief is a continued whine, and her dignity consists in a mere elevation of the head and a lofty measurement of the voice. Whenever she procures applause, the applause belongs to MRS. SIDDONS, because it is only in the imitation of that sublime actress she ever wins a single clap.

Thus when the mother of the long-lost Douglas, hearing the old shepherd relate how he found and brought up a nobly spirited boy, cries out in an anguish of impatience "Was he alive?" every body applauds MRS. POWELL in her delivery of that exclamation, but every body knows that she copies it exactly from MRS. SIDDONS. MRS. POWELL however cannot copy the countenance of MRS. SIDDONS, and therefore in characters whose effect depends wholly on countenance she excites no applause: the face of MRS. SIDDONS in Lady Macbeth is a volume of terrible meaning, that of MRS. POWELL is a blank page of no meaning at all.

Nothing can be less interesting than a player, who to obtain our applause is thus obliged to remind us of another player. A man who could imitate the nightingale might collect an audience, but who would go to hear one that imitated the imitator?

SECTION II.—COMEDY.

I COULD write a long treatise upon comedy; I could tell my readers that it's name is derived from the Greek; that the ancients did not know as much of it as the moderns; that some paltry writers, such as CONGREVE, DRYDEN, and VOLTAIRE, have defined it to be a natural picture of human follies; and that divers great geniuses, such as REYNOLDS, DIBDIN, and CHERRY, insist it means nothing but farce; but this I leave to MISS SEWARD, or MR. PRATT, or some other original writer, who says a number of good things quite foreign to the subject. I am writing not upon authors, but actors.

It has long been a question, whether as great a genius is required in comic as in tragic acting. This question must be agitated with respect to the best actors only, for I have no doubt that mediocrity is more easily attained in tragedy: a distinct utterance and a grave indifference of visage, which is the look of common life, will qualify a man to

make sublime speeches on the stage, and to call himself a tragedian; he need not have any face whatever; all that is necessary is to saw the air alternately with the arms and to identify every syllable, and the newspapers will tell him he is a most respectable performer. But to be comic it is absolutely necessary to have a command of feature and of tone: comedy deals much in equivocation, the humour of which is enforced by the opposite expressions of look and of tone, or by an agreement of both differing from the speech itself. I could bring twenty tragedians, that without either look or tone, except a vacant seriousness and a hollow monotony, shall go through twenty speeches in a very respectable manner; but shew me a single comedian, that can do such a thing without being hissed.

Nevertheless it appears to me, that a great tragedian is a finer genius than a great comedian. Passions are more difficult of conception than habits; tragedy is wholly occupied with passions, and though comedy is occupied both with passions and habits, yet it is principally with the latter; the passions of comedy are more faint than those of tragedy, they are rather emotions and inclinations, for if they strengthen into a powerful character they become tragic: thus sentimental comedy, in which the passions sometimes exert

all their strength, is nothing more than an alternate compound of comedy and tragedy, just as the *Orlando* of ARIOSTO or the *Lutrin* of BOILEAU is a mixture of seriousness and pleasantry.*

It is more difficult to conceive † passions than

* ARIOSTO did not profess to write after the rules of art, and in such an endless diversity of subjects may be allowed this mixture, which indeed has given his poem a wonderful character at once of wit and sublimity; but BOILEAU calls his *Lutrin un ouvrage de pure plaisanterie*, a work of mere pleasantry, and yet after five humourous cantos he introduces a serious allegory of Piety and Justice to compliment his friend M. *de Lamoignon*. This unexpected seriousness had been placed with much less offence in any part of the mock-heroic rather than the end: it is an awkward thing for a reader to rise from a ludicrous performance with a grave face.

† I would not be understood in the following argument as using the words *conception* and *imagination* indiscriminately. *Conception* is a dependant and passive capacity, that receives ideas suggested by others, and therefore belongs principally to the *actor*, who displays the ideas of the *poet*. *Imagination* is an original and active power, that forms it's own images and impresses them upon the minds of others: it belongs therefore more to the *poet*. But actors have sometimes to imagine as well as to conceive, for if the suggestions of the poet are few and feeble, they must be invigorated by the additional ideas of the actor, who in this instance *imagines* as well as *conceives*: thus the sublime action related of MRS. SIDDONS in page 20 was entirely the result of imagination, as the author had given no suggestion whatever of such an

habits, principally because the former are less subject to common observation: in comic characters we generally recognize the manners or peculiarities of some person with whom we are acquainted, or who is at least known in the world; but of the deeper tragic passions we have only read, or heard; we never see in society an impassioned character like *Macbeth*, or *King Lear*, or *Hamlet*; such characters exhibit themselves on great occasions only, their very nature prevents their appearance in common life; but habits appear no where else: the idea of passion therefore requires more imagination than that of habit.

Imagination then is the great test of genius; that which is done by imagination is more difficult than that which is performed by discernment or experience. It is for this reason, that the actor is to be estimated, like the painter and the poet, not for his representation of the common occurrences of the world, not for his discernment of the familiarities of life, but for his idea of images never submitted to the observation of the senses. In the polite arts imagination is always more es-

idea. If the characters in modern plays were represented with the mere action and spirit which the ideas of the authors suggested, they would never disgrace the stage for a whole season instead of a single night.

teemed than humour: humour presents us with visible objects, imagination

> ——————— bodies forth
> The forms of things unseen,———
> ——— and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Both SMIRKE and HOGARTH are great geniuses, yet who will say that SMIRKE is as great a genius as WEST, or HOGARTH as MICHAEL ANGELO? CONGREVE knew all the elegancies and BUTLER all the eccentricities of wit, and both were intimately acquainted with the follies of mankind, yet who will compare the author of *Hudibras* with the author of *Paradise Lost*, or the humour of CONGREVE with the sublimities of SHAKSPEARE? SWIFT is most probably the greatest wit that ever lived, but he will never obtain a reputation equal to that of MILTON or SHAKSPEARE. It is observed even of schoolboys, that those who surpass their companions in humour and mimickry do not promise so great a genius as those who exhibit a serious and romantic disposition, who are fonder of HOMER and SOPHOCLES than TERENCE and PLAUTUS, and who in their themes and declamations wander from familiar expression into far-fetched and even extravagant

language. Humour surprises and wins, but it never elevates: it meets with too great familiarity our common ideas, and while it amuses us with it's powers leaves us sufficient contentment with our own: imagination surprises, wins, and elevates too; it carries us off from our level with earthly objects and ordinary cares, it bears the mind to it's highest pitch of ascent, transports us through every region of thought and of feeling, and teaches us that we have something within us more than mortal. A tragic actor therefore, as he displays more imagination, possesses a more *poetical* genius than a comedian. This epithet, if it is allowed in it's present application, might finish my argument; the word *poetical* when applied to genius always indicates the highest genius, and it is observable that those arts to which the epithet can with propriety be given are superior to those which disagreeing with it's implied qualities have not sufficient *mind* to deserve it. Thus a great painter is a finer genius than a great musician, because he displays more imagination and consequently more of the *poetical;* HANDEL, who rises to the sublime in music, is a more *poetical* genius than REEVE, who deals in the quirks and jollities of the humourous ballad: and the lowest musician is a more *poetical* genius

than the maker of a musical instrument, because the former requires some degree of imagination while the latter is a mere manufacturer. By the same reasoning MRS. SIDDONS, who excels in the sublime and the pathetic, which require a lofty imagination and powerful sensibility, is an actress of a *poetical* mind; but we can never say that MR. LEWIS, who represents common life and is employed principally in mere copy, is of a genius rising to the *poetical*, though he is an excellent comedian.

Another argument for the superior genius of the tragic actor is his superiority of taste: he delights in the highest of intellectual pleasures, the pathetic and the sublime: he turns from the familiar vanities and vulgarities of common life to the contemplation of heroism, of wisdom, and of virtue; he is occupied with the soul only. The comedian on the other hand has little to do with the intellectual properties of human nature; his attention is directed to the lighter follies of men, to fashions and habits, to the familiar domestic manners, in short to trifling and adventitious qualities rather than to inherent character. This superior taste will always be found united with superiority of genius: nobody will deny, that MILTON possessed a greater taste than BUTLER, CORNEILLE than RABE-

LAIS, or DANTE than TASSONI: RAPHAEL, who studied the most beautiful objects, and excelled in the simple dignity of nature, and GUIDO, who dipped his pencil in tears, strike us with their noble taste more particularly after we have seen the grotesque postures and monstrosities of CALLOT, or the historical attempts of HOGARTH, who, great as he was in humourous character and discriminative of fine taste in others, certainly displayed no fine taste in his own serious works.*

I have always thought it an argument for the superiority of poetry over the other polite arts, that it is more productive of polite manners than either painting or music. There is not a poet

* HOGARTH ridiculed with infinite happiness the want of taste in painters, but he could not correct them by example. His serious pictures, so far from being models of grace, are scarcely any thing better than unintended caricatures; his little MOSES brought before PHARAOH looks like a schoolboy approaching his master in all the fear of a whipping. If this great genius however failed in the practice of taste, what must we say to the tasteful theory of King GEORGE the SECOND, who enraged at the picture representing the march to Finchley, which was shewn him to procure his favour for the artist, and thinking it a libel on his soldiers, peevishly asked "*Who is this* HOGARTH?" "*Please your Majesty, he is a painter.*" "*Bainter!*" exclaimed the elegant monarch; "*I hate all* BAINTERS *and* BOETS *too!*"

whose life is recorded by DR. JOHNSON, nor indeed any great poet, with whose private history we are acquainted, who did not bear the character of a gentleman;* we cannot say this of painters, and certainly not of musicians. I do not mean to argue that politeness is always a mark of genius, for I meet with polite fools every day of my life, though to be polite at all times and upon all occasions, or in other words to be perfectly well-bred, is the effect of no mean sense: but as good breeding among men of genius is generally found to be proportionate to their mental excellence, we may conclude that the superior manners of tragic over comic actors in private life is some proof of their superior genius. A tragedian being always occupied in the study of noble manners and in the contemplation of great ideas, naturally acquires a personal behaviour superior to that of the comedian, who can seldom escape the contagion of the familiar and ridiculous manners which he delights to represent: mimics can-

* I could never exactly understand what ADDISON meant, when, in answer to a correspondent who desired to know the *chief* qualification of a good poet, he replied "*To be a very well-bred man.*" But we may certainly gather from this reply, that he had a very high opinion of the general manners and polite character of great poets. Spectator, No. 314.

not always get rid of their mimicry; those who are fond of imitating stutterers are often well rewarded by becoming stutterers themselves. It is true, I advance this argument concerning the politeness of actors not so much from my own experience, as from public opinion. But when public opinions are lasting they are seldom wrong.

The public indeed might always settle disputes about public men, if we could obtain it's general opinion; and I have no doubt that it conceives a higher character of tragic than of comic genius. An audience, who on the same evening should see MR. KEMBLE in *King John* and MR. BANNISTER in *Young Philpot*, would feel no hesitation in thinking the former the greater genius, though it might be more delighted with the latter. There are some people in the world, full of careless goodnature and merriment, whom every body calls *jolly fellows*, and with whom every body thinks himself on a level, because though they always amuse they never elevate the mind. Such is the admiration an audience feels for a comic actor: there is something of respect wanting. The dignity of the tragedian on the contrary, as it is elevated above common life, is elevated above our familiarity, and is contemplated with respect as well as pleasure.

Nevertheless a comic genius requires no common fancy and no common observation of life. There are tricks and shadows of character, which are so rarely exhibited in the world, that they are to be deduced from the probable effects of general character rather than from known peculiarities, and must therefore be left to the imagination. The chief qualification of a comedian is an instantaneous perception of every thing that varies from the general seriousness of human nature, or from that behaviour which is contemplated with a serious indifference. This variation must nevertheless be found in real life, or it becomes farcical; and as the actor shews his genius in the conception of humourous character, so it is in the nice division of comedy from farce that he shews his judgment; such a division is a mark of his genius also, for however an able comedian may sometimes indulge in forced humour, a perpetual caricature is always a mark of a lesser genius: it is like bombast in tragedy, it paints to the senses not to the heart, and diverts the attention of the audience from too close an examination into the player's imitative talent. When the actor is to represent the *Merry-Andrew* drolleries of Reynolds, let him, in the name of goodnature, do as much as he can for the author by all the grins

and grimaces his jaws can contrive; but let him preserve in their noble simplicity of shape the natural images of SHAKSPEARE and of CONGREVE; when we see the nature of these fine geniuses distorted, it is like contemplating a deformed person once beautiful; we think of nothing but the beauty it originally possessed, we cannot laugh, we feel sorrow and pity.

MR. BANNISTER.

When I write the name of Bannister, a host of whimsical forms and humourous characters seems to rise before me, and I had much rather lay down my pen and indulge myself in laughter. But there is a time for all things; laughter is a social pleasure, and as I have got nobody to laugh with me, I had better be composed.

Mr. Bannister is the first low comedian on the stage. Let an author present him with a humourous idea, whether it be of jollity, of ludicrous distress, or of grave indifference, whether it be mock-heroic, burlesque, or mimicry, and he embodies it with an instantaneous felicity. No actor enters so well into the spirit of his audience as well as his author, for he engages your attention immediately by seeming to care nothing about you; the stage appears to be his own room, of which the audience compose the fourth wall: if they clap him, he does not stand still to enjoy their applause; he continues the action, if he can-

not continue the dialogue; and this is the surest way to continue their applause. The stage is always supposed to be an actual room, or other scene, totally abstracted from an observant multitude, just like the room in which I am now scribbling: an actor therefore, who indulges himself every moment in looking at the audience and acknowledging their approbation, is just as ridiculous as I should be myself, if I were to look every moment at the reflection of my own smiles in my looking-glass, or make a bow to the houses on the other side of the way.

Though I hardly know which excellence to prefer in MR. BANNISTER'S general performance, yet upon the whole I think his expression of jovial honesty, or what may be called *heartiness*, is the most prominent. There is no actor who makes the slightest approach to him in this expression, and therefore no actor equals him in the character of a sailor. MR. MUNDEN gives us all the *rough*, but none of the *pleasant* honesty of a sailor, and he has at all times too much grimace for natural jollity: the heart does not study to torture the countenance. MR. BANNISTER possesses all the firmness with all the generous goodnature of the seaman; his open smile, his sincere tone of voice, his careless gait, his person that seems to have undergone all that

long and robust labour that must gain the sailor a day of jollity, in short every action of his body and his mind belongs to that generous race, of whom CHARLES the SECOND observed they "got their money like horses and spent it like asses."

But this is not the only expression in which this natural actor is unrivalled; there is another, in which he is, if possible, still less approachable by any performer, that of *ludicrous distress*. It is extremely difficult to manage this expression so as to render it agreeable to the spectators, because it is calculated to excite their contempt: the only method is to unite with it an air of goodnature, for goodnature is a qualification, in the possession of which no degree of rank or of sense can be altogether unpleasing. BANNISTER'S natural air of sincerity easily gives him this recommendation. Who in the midst of laughter has not felt for the well-meaning *Marplot* whining at his unfortunate interferences, or at the blusterous *Acres* quaking in the manfulness of his duelling? I cannot conceive a more humourous scene, than that in the *Rivals* where *Acres* is waiting with a pistol in each hand for the man he has challenged: the author's dialogue between the challenger and his second possesses an exquisite humour, but it is doubly enlivened by the consummate bye-play of BANNISTER, who as the hour of combat approaches begins

to shew personal symptoms of terror, gradually loses the affected boldness of his voice, and trembles first in his hands and knees and then in his whole body: no description of mine could represent the ludicrous woe of his countenance, when he is coolly asked by his second, whether in case of a mischance he would chuse a snug grave in the neighbouring church, or be pickled and sent home to the country; nor can any action be more humourously imagined, than his impotent endeavours to pick up his hat which he pushes about with his quivering fingers.

There is yet a third excellence in which he would still have had no competitor, if the stage had not lately been enriched by the acquisition of MATHEWS, an actor of whom it is difficult to say whether his characters belong most to him or he to his characters. The greatest comedians have thought themselves happy in understanding one or two comic characters, but what shall we say of BANNISTER, who in one night personates six, and with such felicity that by the greater part of the audience he is sometimes taken for some unknown actor? If he never acted in any other play, his performance of *Colonel Feignwell* in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* would stamp him as one of the greatest and most versatile comedians. Of his five transmigrations, into *a Beau, an antiqua-*

rian Traveller, *a Dutch Merchant*, *an old Steward*, and a *Quaker*, the first is his least happy metamorphosis, because he cannot affect an air of jauntiness: his imitation of an aukward beau, in the character of *Acres*, for instance, is perfectly happy; but the robust person and the robust manners, which render this *aukward* imitation easy, prevent him from giving a real picture of finical shewiness. The *antiquarian Traveller*, I do not pretend to criticise; BANNISTER makes it amusing, as he does every thing; but the authoress, MRS. CENTLIVRE, has made it like nothing upon earth. That a man in a long beard should pretend, in an age like this, to come to an antiquarian with a story of his wonderful travels and of a girdle that makes him invisible, and that he should put this girdle on the antiquarian and persuade him that he is not to be seen, is a story fit for Mother Bunch's Tales only. If such a traveller were to come to one of the most doating antiquaries living, he would be sent to Bow-street for an impostor. But I am afraid I am wandering too much upon MRS. CENTLIVRE, who without doubt wrote the most entertaining dramas of intrigue with a genius infinitely greater and a modesty infinitely less than that of her sex in general, and who delighted, whenever she could not be obscene, to be improbable. If our *antiqua-*

rian Traveller, however, is not to be found in real life, the *Dutch Merchant* is a very natural personage and is most naturally represented by MR. BANNISTER. Every citizen in the Pit must feel his heart grow warm when he sees the substantial Dutchman come lounging with a sort of dignified roll into the Stock Exchange, with one hand in his breeches pocket and the other grasping a huge tobacco-pipe, with an air in short expressive of pocket-warmth and of a sovereign contempt for every one void of a good conscience and of stock: this is another excellent specimen of MR. BANNISTER's idea of goodnatured bluntness and plain dealing, to which his natural air of sincerity, that cannot be too often admired, so forcibly contributes; it is a faultless imitation; his very coat, reaching almost down to his heels and swinging as he walks, has something warm and monied in it. The transformation into the *Quaker* is not very difficult to any actor; an unmeaning sedateness of countenance and an inflexible stiffness of limbs are all that is requisite: for this reason any of our indifferent comedians can assume this image-character, and there is a man of the name of DORMER, who, though he can do nothing else, performs *Obadiah Prim* very insipidly and very naturally. But MR. BANNISTER's metamorphosis into the decrepid *Old Steward* whining for

the death of his master is as admirable as it is difficult. The state of old age is a condition, of which no man perhaps can enter exactly into the personal feelings: it has no desire of motion; but a player is always wishing to be in a state of action, and acquires a habit of exercising his limbs momentarily, as may be seen sometimes in his gestures off the stage. The principal deficiency in the representation of old age generally arises from this propensity to motion. Thus an indifferent player, who naturally thinks that a stick will add to the decrepid appearance of age, forgets his support in the eagerness of winning applause by a show of energy, and thumps the floor or amuses his chin with it. An actor named PURSER, who is very well when he plays the fool, and then only when the fool is a footman, sometimes misrepresents old age in this manner, and beats his mouth with his cane when he would affect an attitude of thought, like a young beau in a room who does it for want of thought. But MR. BANNISTER in his old age is not MR. BANNISTER in his manhood: he loses at once all his natural vivacity and robustness of manner, and sinks into that dependant feebleness which seems at once to fear and to look for protection from every surrounding object. Other old men on the stage take

off their hats or pull out their handkerchiefs as composedly as young men; but Mr. BANNISTER has the perpetual tremulousness and impotent eagerness of superannuation: if he takes out a paper, he quivers it about before he can open it, and if he makes a speech of any length he enfeebles it by frequent breaks of forgetfulness and weariness, with that sort of pause, which seems as if it were recollecting what had already been said, or preparing for what remained to be said. One admirable mark of the feeble impatience of age must ever be remembered as one of the most natural originalities in MR. BANNISTER's personation of the *Old Steward*. In thanking the heir of his deceased master for continuing some family favours to him, and in promising to overcome the violence of his grief for so heavy a loss, he trembles through four or five words with tolerable composure; but suddenly bursts out into a weeping of impatient recollection and exclaims with rapidity—"But when I think of my poor master my tears will flow." An inferior actor would have added these words to his promise of patience in the same tone; but MR. BANNISTER understands that violent grief becomes only the more violent from temporary repression.

But to enumerate all the original excellences of MR. BANNISTER's comic genius would be to enu-

merate every comic character he performs, and I must not linger on the recollection of his mischievous boyishness in *Tony Lumkin*, his good-humoured vulgarity in *Scrub*, or his strutting vanity as the footman *Lissardo*, when he delights himself and torments his neglected mistress by displaying his new ring, or endeavours with an important interference to settle the disputes of the two maid servants in love with him. There is one performance however, of which it is impossible not to indulge myself in the recollection. It is that of *Young Philpot* in MURPHY'S comedy of the *Citizen*: if any thing can excel the grave moniedness he affects in order to cheat his father, it is his description of the garret-author, of that miserable pamphleteer who, holding one baby on his knee and rocking another in the cradle with his foot, is writing a political essay with his right hand while he occasionally twirls round a scrag of roast pork with his left: during this description the mirth of the audience becomes impatient to express itself, till the admirable mimic having wound up his climax by a picture of the author's wife washing clothes in a corner to the song of *Sweet Passion of Love*, it bursts into a tempestuous approbation. As this description is introduced by the author of the *Citizen* as a mere anecdote related by *Young Philpot*, a common actor would have told it in a passing way as anec-

dotes are commonly related: BANNISTER puts himself in the situation of the belaboured pamphleteer, he dandles his child, then writes a line, then rocks the other child, then writes another line, then gives the griskin a twist; his hankerchief is taken out and he becomes the author's wife, accompanies the dabs and scrubbings of the washing-tub with *Sweet Passion of Love*, and as it's ardour grows more vehement screams out the tender love-song to the furious wringing of her small linen. I am afraid I am a little prolix here, but what we remember with delight we are always precise in describing, lest we should not tell the story as well as it was told us.

MR. BANNISTER in short in his comic character is always animated, is always natural, except when he assumes the lively *gentleman:* the attainment of this character does not appear to be in the nature of his broad vigourous style of acting: he is a giant bestriding a butterfly. His *Mercutio* is not gay, but *jolly;* it exhibits, not the elegant vivacity of the *gentleman*, but the boisterous mirth of the *honest fellow:* the audience immediately feel themselves on a level with him, and this familiar sensation is always a proof that the *gentleman* is absent. The passion for affecting this character is unfortunately almost as universal on the stage as it is in real life: an actor thinks he

has nothing to do but to dress himself fashionably and clap a cocked hat under his arm, and he becomes the *gentleman* ; thus the stage is crowded with *genteel* comedians, from MR. HENRY JOHNSTON, who is nothing less than a tragedy hero in a round hat, down to MR. JOHN PALMER, who looks as if he had just emerged from a kitchen; and yet, after all, there are but two actors who are happy in an elegant vivacity.

But it is worthy of greater praise to catch the feelings than the manners of men. MR. BANNISTER contrives to mingle the *heart* with his broadest humour, and it is this union of things so often remote that constitutes his most solid praise: FOOTE could imitate every body, but he was a mere mimic though an admirable one: few of our modern comedians have any feeling; FAWCETT has very little, SIMMONS has none, LEWIS fritters his away, and MUNDEN mocks his own pathetic with a thousand wry faces. The most pleasing excellence is that which is performed with the least effort; to mingle feeling with humour, and humour with feeling, seems to be MR. BANNISTER's nature rather than his art; this felicity gives him another praise, which he must be content however to share with DOWTON, an actor, whom I conceive to be one of the first comic geniuses our stage has produced. For the qualifi-

cation, to which I allude, I do not know that there is any name: the Italians, whose motley productions have given them a knack at verbal compounds, may have an appellation for it that I have not discovered: it cannot be called tragi-comedy, for though it breathes a gentle spirit of humour, it's essence is really serious; it differs widely from *ludicrous distress*, for though it raises our smiles, it never raises our contempt, but in the midst of our very inclination to be amused absolutely moves us with a pathetic sympathy; perhaps it may be defined the *humourous pathetic*, the art of raising our tears and our smiles together, while each have a simple and distinct cause. But I shall explain myself best by example.

In the play of *John Bull*, which glimmers with the hasty genius of an author who could do better, the principal character, called *Job Thornberry*, is a country tradesman of an excellent heart and much natural sense, who being forsaken by a seduced but amiable daughter, is overwhelmed alternately with indignation at her fault and pity at her misfortune; there is a vulgarity about the man, but it renders his grief more natural; his thoughts, unrestrained by refinement, suggest no concealment of emotion, and therefore he is loud and bitter in his sorrow. This abandonment to his feelings, acting upon manners naturally coarse, produces now and

then a kind of aukward pathetic, at which we cannot but smile: the actor's skill therefore should prevent the pathetic from degenerating into a mere laughable eccentricity, it should interest our feeling while it provokes our risibility, in short should depress while it enlivens and enliven while it depresses. This union of opposite effects requires some portion of tragic as well as comic powers, and BANNISTER'S *Job Thornberry* is respected with all its bluntness, and pitied with all its oddity; the tears and the smiles of his audience break out together, and sorrow and mirth are united. When the spectators are inclined to be merry, he recalls their sympathy with some look or gesture of manly sorrow; when they are fixed on his grief, he strikes out their smiles by some rapid touch of peevish impatience or some whimpering turn of voice. It is thus that he holds the balance of tragic and comic feeling in the character of *Walter* in the *Children in the Wood*, though in his representation of that honest servant as well as of the dishonest one in the drama of *Deaf and Dumb*, he shews that he can divest himself entirely of his mirth, and though he assumes nothing of the dignity of tragedy, can express its homelier feelings with a strongly continued effect. When he returns home, in the *Children in the Wood*, after having lost the infants, and careless of his enquiring

friends, drops with a stare of mute anguish into a seat, he produces as true a feeling in the audience as MRS. SIDDONS would produce in loftier characters. Then again his natural coarse chearfulness, struggling with his sorrow, breaks forth in some quaint reply or ludicrous habit of gesture. This is the true art of acting. A player who gives us none of these touches and varieties of character is like a Chinese painter, whose men and women are mere outlines, with indistinct dashes for features.

BANNISTER would really be an unexceptionable actor, if he could think no more of the man of fashion and elegance. What VOLTAIRE said to CONGREVE, when the latter hoped he was not visited as an author but as a gentleman, may be said with sufficient politeness by the town to MR. BANNISTER, "If you were nothing but a gentleman, sir, depend upon it I should not take the trouble of coming to see you."

MR. LEWIS.

It is not necessary to turn hermit and live upon roots in order to gain a healthy and animated old age; temperance is the strengthener of existence equally in the city and in the field; if old Parr when he was upwards of a hundred years old stood in a white sheet for an offence not very possible to old age, the great Newton, at a period of life little less advanced, reviewed and corrected the most profound productions of the human mind. The powers of Mr. Lewis at the age of fifty-seven will not astonish those who have considered these matters, but they will astonish every one who has an impaired memory or a shaking hand, they will astonish those old young men who cannot carry a glass of wine to their lips without making all the angles in Euclid.

It must however be universally surprising, that of the only two actors on the stage who can represent the careless vivacity of youth, an old man is the most lively. Elliston gives us an

excellent picture of youthful animation, but it is an animation corrected by an attention to *the gentleman:* LEWIS is all heart, all fire; he does not study forms and ceremonies, he is polite from a natural wish to please, and if he is not always the gentleman nobody doubts what he could be. This comparison will be well understood by those who have seen the two actors in the character of *Rover* in *Wild Oats*. In the scene where the young rustic expresses his admiration of *Rover*'s theatrical talents and at parting shakes his hand with good-natured familiarity, ELLISTON in the midst of his reciprocal good humour has too much the air of one who condescends; LEWIS gives the bumpkin as hearty a shake as if it had been his brother and forgets every thing but the honest soul of his new acquaintance.

It is in characters like these, full of frankness and vivacity, that MR. LEWIS claims an original excellence. I do not see by what propriety he has been called by the exclusive title of *Gentleman* LEWIS; perhaps it is because he never acts vulgarly, and without doubt vulgarity seems totally impossible to an actor of his manners: but it does not follow, that he who never acts vulgarly should always act with refinement. The character of a complete gentleman is a very difficult one to define, perhaps it consists in the power of pleasing

refinedly; but this refinement is the consequence of an habitual study to please, and the careless goodnature of some characters represented by MR. LEWIS, of *Rover* for instance, does not please by its refinement but by its innate goodness of heart. That this last qualification is not necessary to the gentleman is a melancholy truth which every one who has seen the world must acknowledge: CAR, Earl of Somerset, was the most polished as well as the most abandoned man of his time, and that courtly scoundrel, the Earl of Chesterfield, who would have made his own son a hypocrite and a liar, was the finest gentleman in Europe.

As it is impossible however in real life to find a man without his defects, so if we meet with one on the stage, who has every excellence of mind, he may still exhibit the defects of habit or of trifling affectation. The habitual errors of MR. LEWIS seem to be the effect of a too lively rather than a too dull conception of character. His two principal defects are a shaking of the head and a respiration of the breath, expressive of a kind of self-satisfaction at a cunning or what is called a *knowing* idea: these expressions moderately used might throw much meaning into his manner; but the more natural they are when considered as the effect of a sudden happiness of thought.

the more unnatural they become when they endeavour to throw vivacity into dull or indifferent speeches, since it is not the manner should enliven the thought but the thought should enliven the manner. Perhaps the chief reason why Frenchmen appear so frivolous to us, is the perpetual vivacity of their manner upon the most unimportant occasions and during the most inanimate speeches; and the worst of this habit is, that when these vivacious gentlemen really do mean to be peculiarly impressive, they have no more effect upon us than at any other time, because their manner cannot be more important, than it has already been upon trifles. It must be observed however, that MR. LEWIS's extreme vivacity is an error attributable to the great interest he takes in his characters, and not, like the errors of MR. KEMBLE, to that abstracted artifice which induces the actor to study his audience more than his character.

But for the other defect of this actor, his eccentricities in dress, I know not how to account.* Of all ridiculous characters on the stage, the modern beau should be the most accurately dressed, because his attention to dress is one of his most ridiculous failings, and because we observe it every day in real life. MR. LEWIS in such a character not only dresses himself in waist-

* See Appendix.

coats and breeches in which nobody else dresses himself, but very frequently astonishes us by flaming in coats ribbed and coloured: if he could divest himself on such occasions of his native elegance of manners and would merely stick a nosegay in his breast, he might pass for an ancient French dancing-master, he might look like a lord mayor's footman, but he never will be a fashionable beau. The only reason we can possible imagine for such an extravagance is the same that induced the late MR. MURPHY to wear a bag-wig to the day of his death, and that still induces a certain lady of rank to cumber herself with the sacks and hoop-petticoats of the last reign; perhaps chequered coats were the fashion in MR. LEWIS's youth, and as he was much admired in them at that time, he considers his powers of pleasing as some way connected with a Harlequin jacket still. This is the only drawback on the excellence of MR. LEWIS's beau, which in every respect of mind (if the word mind may be used when speaking of beaux) wants nothing of perfection.

MR. LEWIS is without doubt the most complete fop on the stage: he inimitably affects all the laborious carelessness of action, the important indifference of voice, and the natural vacuity of look, that are the only social distinctions of those ineffable animals called loungers.

Yet from this very excellence arises a defect in his general style of acting. That which is the chief employment of our minds, generally gives a turn to all our ideas; the same habit, which makes the shopkeeper so often allude to his business in common conversation, induces MR. KEMBLE to carry his natural important stiffness into all his characters, and gives a tinge of the beau to MR. LEWIS in his most finished portraits of the gentleman. In his elegant sentiment, in the very seriousness of his love, there is a flippant airiness, a vivacious importance, a sort of French flutter, that hurts the sincerity of his manner and looks more like a study to recommend himself than to please others for their own sakes. The less he has to do with the polished gentleman, the less does he practise this frippery, and the little which he preserves at all times adds to the harmless nonsense of some of his characters, and gives to his less refined ones an affectation by no means unpleasing. If his *Squire Groom* in *Love A-la-mode*, who is a Newmarket hero, has now and then a little too much of refined action for the *blood*, it must be recollected that the Squire is paying his addresses to a lady, and may therefore be allowed to affect something a little out of his sphere.

With this character in *Love A-la-mode*, if I were writing a panegyric instead of a criticism, I would

sum up my highest praises of MR. LEWIS. Who should fear the approach of old age, should dread it's debility of frame and it's dissolution of intellect, when they see what temperance can perform? For my part, when I see an old man, who wears a star and is called *His Grace*, tottering and coughing upon a bolstered poney, and another old man, whom nobody can discover to be old, sporting on the stage with all the vivacity of youth, I bless my good fortune that I have to labour for my future livelihood, and say to myself "It's much better to keep one's health than to keep a seraglio."

MR. MUNDEN.

One of the most amiable effects of the modern drama is to injure those to whom it is most indebted for support. If the principal characters of Reynolds and of Dibdin are always out of nature, their representation, as I have already hinted, must be unnatural also; and as our comic actors are perpetually employed upon these punchinellos, as they are always labouring to grimace and grin them into applause, they become habituated and even partial to their antics, and can never afterwards separate the effect from the means, the applause from the unnatural style of acting. The extravagance therefore of look and gesture, so necessary to the caricatures of our farci-comic writers, they cannot help carrying into the characters of our best dramatists, to which it is every way injurious.

This is the great fault of Mr. Munden, who is unluckily one of the strongest supports to our gigan-

tic farces, and whose powers, like his features, have been so twisted out of their proper direction, that they seem unable to recover themselves. Almost the whole force of his acting consists in two or three ludicrous gestures and an innumerable variety of as fanciful contortions of countenance as ever threw woman into hysterics: his features are like the reflection of a man's face in a ruffled stream, they undergo a perpetual undulation of grin: every emotion is attended by a grimace, which he by no means wishes to be considered as unstudied, for if it has not immediately its effect upon the spectators, he improves or continues it till it has; and I have seen his interlocutor disconcerted, and the performance stopped, by the unseasonable laughter of the audience, who were conquered into the notice of a posthumous joke by this ambitious pertinacity of muscle.

All this suits admirably well with a character entirely farcical, or with one that has no intrinsic humour, and I recollect no actor, who by the mere abuse of his features could gain so much favour for a modern comedy. If ever such an abuse becomes natural, it is in the deformity of drunkenness. MR. MUNDEN therefore, whose action is as confined as his features are vagrant, excels in the relaxed gesture and variable fatuity of intoxication. His most entertaining performances are always of

this kind, as that for instance of *Crack* in the *Turnpike Gate* and the *Captain's servant* in the musical puppetshow called the *English Fleet*. His attitude and looks in the latter piece, when he receives a ring from a lady as a reward for some courageous service, his tottering earnestness in contemplating the honour on his finger, and the conscious glance which he turns now and then at his captain behind him, exhibit a masterpiece of drunken vanity. These are the touches which brighten the miserable daubs of our dramatists, which throw life into their inanimate figures, and character into their half-formed countenances. MR. MUNDEN, in his imitation of an intoxicated man, always shews his judgment by standing as much as possible in one place. Our actors in general seem to forget, that a person under the influence of liquor, unless he is almost insensible, always attempts a command of himself and restrains his motions as much as the weakness of his limbs will permit; they are too fond of reeling round the stage, and jerking up one leg at every step, like a tavern blood affecting his six bottles. I have heard that the late MR. SUETT used always to be really drunk when he performed a drunkard, but the generality of our performers may certainly be exculpated from such a charge: perhaps the only actor who approaches MUNDEN in this exquisite display of

brutality is MR. ROBERT PALMER. Truly we stage-critics treat of lofty matters!

But of simplicity MR. MUNDEN shews not a shadow; and as old men in general, and particularly old soldiers and citizens, have long forgotten the antics of schoolboys, this perpetual mouth-making destroys his natural representation of age: no man in years accompanies his whole conversation with this harmony or rather this discord of feature; an old soldier would despise it as boyish, and an old citizen as unprofitable: an old courtier perhaps, if his king is fond of buffoonery, is more likely to accommodate his countenance to the sallies of those about him, but when MR. MUNDEN represents POLONIUS, he forgets he is in a gloomy court, where the king and queen are afflicted with melancholy and the young prince HAMLET supposed to be deranged. In his performance of MENENIUS in *Coriolanus*, this buffoonery is still more inconsistent. MENENIUS was a man of wit and prudence, and is celebrated in history for his fable of the belly and the members, with which he appeased the discordant divisions of the people: SHAKSPEARE, taking advantage of the familiarity of that popular address, has perhaps rendered the language and the manners of MENENIUS too generally familiar, and given the comedian an opportunity of displaying his merri-

ment rather too broadly; but it should never be forgotten, that MENENIUS was not only of the patrician order, a class of men proverbially haughty, but that he was the intimate friend of the haughty CORIOLANUS, who was the proudest man in Rome and not very likely to associate with buffoons. If SHAKSPEARE therefore, in his fondness for generalizing the character of men and in his determination to avoid what may be called a chronology of nature, has represented MENENIUS in the light of a merry old modern nobleman, the actor would shew his art and his classical judgment in preventing his mirth from extravagance by every possible temperance of action, so that the man of humour might not entirely overcome the man of rank. At any rate MR. MUNDEN should endeavour to moderate the restlessness of his muscles in representing a patrician and a senator. But then the galleries would not laugh.

This actor in short loses half his proper effect by the very strength of his powers: he brings as much expression into his face for an emotion or even an inuendo, as he ought for the liveliest passions: thus he rarely gives us the shadows or gradations of feeling, from the mere exertion of his expression: he is a jumper, who in order to leap four yards, takes a spring that inevi-

tably carries him six: he is like that poetical artist Mr. Fuseli, who to exhibit his anatomical skill discloses every joint and muscle of a clothed figure, when he should merely shadow out their appearances.

Strange! By the means defeated of the ends!

MR. FAWCETT.

When original genius cannot be displayed, a mere peculiarity or eccentricity will sometimes obtain as much notice, though it's success will not be so lasting. It is to this eccentricity must be attributed the praise which indifferent actors as well as indifferent writers have now and then gained from the public, and to much of it Mr. Fawcett is chiefly indebted for his present popularity.

A hastiness of action, a singular harshness and rapidity of utterance, and a general confidence of manners, constitute the great effect of this actor's performance; and as these are qualities that want little diversity to produce laughter from the galleries, he succeeds in characters of broad farce. His harshness and rapid strength of utterance are indeed very powerful peculiarities, and he contrives to give them their full glory in his assaults on the risible muscles of his audience: there is

something so effectual in the jovial hurry of his voice and the rough complacency of his concluding hems, that the audience are always prepared to laugh when they hear his preparatory gabbling behind the scenes, and I really know no actor, except MUNDEN, who can procure so much applause for characters and speeches intrinsically wretched. Those who have seen him in MR. COLMAN'S exquisite farce of the *Review* and in MR. DIBDIN'S farcical farrago of *Five Miles Off* will recollect the wonderful effect of his peculiarities and the consummate air of droll self-satisfaction, with which he rushes through his merry speeches. I cannot discover a single performer who could represent the ever-busy and ever-talking *Caleb Quotem* in the former farce with such power of action and of voice: MATHEWS cannot but amuse in the part, but he must exactly imitate FAWCETT, if he wishes to succeed in what was evidently designed for that actor's peculiarities: he must imitate the character and the actor too, when they are both, as it were, intentionally identified, and as he very properly avoids imitation, when he possesses such excellent originality, he had better avoid the part altogether. He fails particularly in the rapid singing of FAWCETT, who contrives with the indulgence of the author, to introduce his rushing

style into most of his original songs. The praise of excellent comic singing must indeed always be allowed MR. FAWCETT, for though almost every comedian can contrive to sing humourously with the assistance of good music, yet few of them can display his readiness of ear for harmony, and his peculiar skill in burlesque melody.

MR. FAWCETT however does not undertake a single natural character which might not be more skilfully represented by his contemporaries. In his attempts at gentlemanly vivacity he becomes awkward and vulgar, like all the professedly low comedians, whose stage habits always cling to them with a malicious inveteracy. For this reason he is invariably deficient in such characters as *Bob Handy* in *Speed the Plough*, in which an air of genteel restraint must occasionally be thrown over the boisterous spirits of good humoured youth: nothing can be more gravely ludicrous than his attempt at serious astonishment in this character, when *Sir Philip Blandford* with much awful preparation details to him a murderous story: at the climax of the horrible relation he assumes the protuberant mouth and raised eyebrows of burlesque doubt, and seems about to exclaim "Woh! You don't tell me so!" Nor is his display of old age a jot happier than his conception of elegant youth: his violent habits of

speech and action will not suffer him to sink into the feeble and subdued spirit of an old man, and perhaps there never was a more complete failure in every gradation of character than was exemplified in his attempt of *Lord Ogleby* in the *Clandestine Marriage*.* In his sailors and servants he is always amusing with his roughness and confidence, but it is the roughness of an actor determined to meet the sympathy of the galleries and the confidence of one who assures himself of applause. The sea-faring character, as I have before said, belongs almost entirely to BANNISTER, and to BANNISTER and MATHEWS perhaps the cunning and obsequiousness of the servant: in the part of *Trappanti*, for instance, in CIBBER'S comedy of *She Would and She Would Not*, MR. FAWCETT is bustling, impudent, and important, but he has none of that occasional conscientious suspicion, none of that air of slouchy roguishness, none of that hang-dog meditation of countenance, with which BANNISTER so inimitably shades his general vivacity. It is unlucky indeed for MR. FAWCETT, that he provokes comparison with this excellent comedian by a frequent performance of the same parts; but nothing shews with more nicety the superiority of the latter, than his acknow-

* See Appendix.

ledged improvement of characters originally represented by MR. FAWCETT, since the first performance generally identifies in the minds of the town the performer with his character, and a departure from his manner is usually imagined to be a departure not only from the nature of the character, but if the play be a new one or produced in the actor's life-time, from the intention of the author also. In the character of *Job Thornberry* for instance, which has been criticised in the article upon BANNISTER, MR. FAWCETT makes vulgarity predominate over feeling and is unintentionally ludicrous when he should be entirely pathetic: when BANNISTER undertook the part he exhibited a new alternation of the humourous and the pathetic: MR. FAWCETT's grief is ludicrous in itself, MR. BANNISTER's in it's alteration to peevishness or obstinacy: MR. FAWCETT blubbers when he should weep, since it does not follow, that when a brazier weeps we should discover his profession by his mode of weeping, for sorrow can sometimes throw an air of refinement even on vulgarity: MR. BANNISTER knows this, and gains the respect of his audience by a manly sorrow. MR. FAWCETT in short is pathetic where his author has distributed touches of feeling that the rudest hand cannot efface; MR. BANNISTER gives his au-

thor additional feeling as well as additional humour, he holds the sympathy of the audience in the nicest balance, and with a word or a sigh can influence the scale as he pleases. Of another of MR. FAWCETT's original characters, that of DR. PANGLOSS in the *Heir at Law*, MR. BANNISTER certainly presents a more natural picture: it is little to object, that MR. COLMAN might have written the part on purpose for MR. FAWCETT, for though an author may distort nature by giving his characters to farcical actors, the strength of his pen may still be powerful enough, with the assistance of a better actor, to spring back to it's rectitude of effect. MR. FAWCETT is without doubt infinitely amusing in this obsequious tutor, but nature has nothing to do with his powers of pleasing: the readers of the character, who had never seen it whirled about by MR. FAWCETT's rude vivacity, would picture to themselves a servile pedant, ready to say and to do any thing for money, but still so much wrapped up in his own learned importance as to preserve the pedant's ancient attributes, a stiff solemnity and a slowness to action: such is the character MR. BANNISTER exhibits in opposition to the joyous intonations and boisterous activity of MR. FAWCETT. The Doctor professes much horror at dancing or at any other violent

derangement of his philosophic gravity, but from MR. FAWCETT's perpetual restlessness of limb and rapidity of utterance one would imagine that the Doctor would have made an excellent dancing-master. MR. COLMAN calls the *Heir at Law* a comedy, but MR. FAWCETT certainly exerts himself with success to make it a farce: and so it will always be, while an actor's chief study is to make his characters merely laughable. Some of these performers think they gain no applause unless they have raised a tempest of laughter: they forget that the most exquisite humour is that which provokes the least mirth; that wit, so superior to mere humour, disdains the acknowledgment of external laughter and is content with that feeling of pleasure and surprize which may be called the laughter of the mind; that a pantomime clown in short, when he breaks his nose against a door, boasts a wilder burst of applause than genuine comedy perhaps ever obtained.

MR. FAWCETT may be numbered among those unfortunate actors, whom the modern farci-comic writers have contributed to spoil; and indeed, if a man has been accustomed from his youth to illustrate the genius of a quack, what are we to expect but that he will be a merry-andrew all his life?

MR. SIMMONS.

This performer, for the sake of effect, may very well be contrasted with Fawcett: his ability is not so various nor perhaps so originally strong, but his style is unassuming, correct, and delicate: he neither thrusts himself upon attention by vehemence or confidence, nor constrains it by distortions of feature, voice, or limb. If there is a quaintness in his manner, it is a natural not an affected one, and it luckily suits his characters, for he does not attempt many, and what he undertakes he always performs.

Simplicity like this is easily described; and it is really a relief to my memory after pursuing the artifices of corrupt actors through all their mazes and distortions, to rest upon the easy nature of Mr. Simmons, who is an original actor without the vices of originality, without presumption, without an undistinguishing confidence of ability. I scarcely recollect a more natural

performance, than his representation of *Beau Mordecai* in *Love A-la-Mode:* perhaps there is something of caricature in the touch of beard at his chin, but nothing can be better expressed than the little Israelite's affectation of jauntiness or than the ignorant vanity which induces him to think every body else an object of ridicule while he himself is the perpetual butt of the company. Before the secession of JOHNSTONE from Covent-Garden, I think it was one of the most complete feasts on the stage to see all the persons in this characteristic farce represented by excellent actors, by SIMMONS in the *Beau Jew*, JOHNSTONE in *Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan*, LEWIS in *Squire Groom*, and COOKE in *Sir Archy M'Sarcasm.*

SIMMONS displays very little variety either of look or of action; his peculiar excellence is the representation of feeble intellect exhibited either in the shape of mere simplicity or of simplicity encouraged into affectation, and pure weakness of mind is of too reposing a nature to indulge in much diversity of manner. His happiest expression is that of a silly importance hurt by neglect. In the character of *Fainwood* in MR. KENNY'S amusing farce of *Raising the Wind*, his bridling stiffness and a voice, which has a natural tone of ludicrous complaint, are exquisitely adapted to

that dignified personage, who has been driven from town by the giggling impertinence of the girls and seeks concealment and respect in the country.

Mr. Simmons in short is fit for a better age of writers; or rather, what actor is not? It is lucky for him indeed, that he has not so much to do with the present race of dramatists as most of the comedians, and infinitely to his credit that when many of them think of nothing but their author's farce, he preserves as well as he can a likeness to nature and chastens in manner what he cannot correct in speech. Every actor indeed, who repeats the nonsense of these scribblers with all it's effect, hurts his own reputation in proportion as he would extend theirs, for when the owl screeches the echo must screech too.

MR. LISTON.

THOSE comedians who are the most happy in their study of nature might very probably, with the slightest attention, become equally happy in caricature, for as they must learn to separate nature from it's contrarieties, so they must undoubtedly understand the contrarieties to be separated. GARRICK, who understood nature in all it's differences, was an admirable mimic, and I can discover no natural comedian of the present day, who is not also an excellent caricaturist, unless indeed we except DOWTON, who seems to have no powers but for powerful nature.

A natural actor however may be said to be natural in two distinct senses; he may be correct in the representation of nature, or he may be correct in the representation of the deviations from nature, and either of these correctnesses is called natural, for this word is applied to imitations not in it's expression of the qualities of

nature only but in it's relation to any appearance in life, natural or artificial, involuntary or assumed; thus we say that MRS. SIDDONS is natural in her expression of grief, which is a natural passion, and that MR. MATHEWS is natural in his imitation of Punch, who is certainly no very natural personage.

In MR. LISTON'S best performances he may be called natural in every sense of the word. His accuracy of conception enables him to represent with equal felicity the most true characters and the most affected habits, and he passes from the simplest rustic to the most conceited pretender with undiminished easiness of attainment. The actor never carries him beyond the characteristic strength of his part; he adds nothing of stage affectation and diminishes nothing of nature; yet his manner is so irresistibly humourous, that he can put the audience into good humour with less effort perhaps than any other comedian.

His happiest performances are his ignorant rustics, and his most inaccurate his old men. Of mere old age he represents nothing. If his usual style of acting is of a still nature, yet it is not able to sink into personal weakness or weariness; if he is often quaint and dispassionate, his general simplicity gives him too youthful an air to represent the experience and the acquired art

of a long life. His old men therefore are old in nothing but their wrinkles and walking-sticks, and as he cannot see his own wrinkles and does not in common want a stick to support himself, his accustomed youthful spirits soon make him forget both.

In more youthful characters of little vigour, whose chief quality is a mixture of ignorance and self-complacency, MR. LISTON indulges in his proper feebleness. There may be observed a general repose of limb and of intellect in his style of acting exquisitely conducive to the character of contented folly; he can seem at ease with all around him, but most voluptuously so with himself: his smile of conceit is most peculiarly significant and enjoying, and I think that the happiest picture of ignorant vanity I ever saw was his representation of the foolish military inamorato in the disjointed farce of *Catch Him Who Can:* nothing could be more irresistible, when he wished to insinuate any one of his peculiar accomplishments, than the curvature of his extended hand, the languid drop of his eyelids, and the thaw of his usually rigid muscles into an affected easiness of smile. For his performance of the *Quaker* in *Five Miles Off* he is to be praised, if it is only for divesting the manners of the Quakers of their stage-exaggeration, and contenting himself-

with the caricature which their vegetating affectation really produces in itself. MATHEWS perhaps had done this before in MISS CHAMBERS's elegant comedy, the *School for Friends*, but a good deal depends upon the author in these cases, and the picture was so judiciously drawn by MISS CHAMBERS, that it was next to impossible to render it extravagant. MR. DIBDIN, with equal judgment no doubt, always leaves room for the caricaturing fancy of the actor, for he cannot produce a picture even badly finished; but MR. LISTON made his *Quaker* like something natural in spite of the farcical speeches put into his mouth, which a Quaker would call profane, and the farcical love-song, which a Quaker, whose sect never sings, would shudder to hear. He neither walked in one undeviating strait line, nor glued his clasped hands to his bosom, nor conversed in the recitative of a parish-clerk, nor rose at every emphasis upon his toes, nor ended all his speeches with a nasal groan. The actors are much mistaken, if they think the quakers do all this even on enthusiastic occasions: a stage-quaker, like MUNDEN in *Wild Oats*, dances up and down to his own sing-song like a stiff puppet on a humdrum barrel-organ; but I question whether those well-clothed ascetics would not consider this

extreme as approaching to the abominable art of music.

It is in the rawness of country simplicity that MR. LISTON excels all his contemporaries. A mere rusticity is not difficult of conception, for it exhibits itself entirely in personal habits and those the most easy of imitation, because they require little or no controul of limbs or of countenance: but the different expressions of absolute inexperience, it's astonishment, it's affected incredulousness and real credulity, it's utterly false conclusions, and it's self-betraying involuntary acknowledgments, require a nice observation and a powerful explanation of countenance and voice. They who have seen MR. LISTON as *Jacob Gawky* in MISS LEE'S *Chapter of Accidents* have seen all these varieties inimitably separated and expressed. But his peculiar expression of amazed ignorance shines with all it's stupidity in a singular drama called the *Three and the Deuce.** He represents a country lad, who imagines his sister to have been seduced by a vivacious gentleman, and accordingly taxes the seducer with his crime in a very homely way: the gentleman, who is one of three brothers exactly resembling each other and who really knows something of the girl but wishes to divert

* See Appendix.

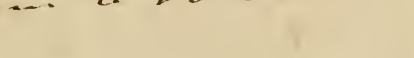
the rustic's attention, starts into one of his usual fits of gaiety, and seizing his brother's astonished footman, who had taken him for his grave master, by one hand, and the rustic by the other, commences a majestic minuet which he accompanies with some burlesque song; the footman, who had been frequently astonished already by this merry alteration of his supposed master, is represented by MATHEWS, who joins in the dance with a countenance perfectly convinced of the man's insanity; but LISTON, whose faculties seem deadened by this freak and who has evidently risen from mere amazement to an admiration of the gentleman's lively talents, acquiesces in the movement with a submission most ludicrously earnest, and follows the steps by a seeming magic, at once imitating his leader's affected importance and appearing totally abstracted from every earthly consideration but his present enchantment: his mouth is open and fixed, his eyes scarcely staring but full of a leaden attention, and his face altogether expressive of an ineffable mixture of ignorance, admiration, and astonishment. This is certainly one of the most ludicrous scenes on the stage, and really provokes one to laughter by the very recollection.

Upon the whole, LISTON is a very original and a very unaffected actor; nor is he of the lower

rank of comedians, for he excels in painting emotions rather than habits,* and therefore has a more intellectual praise than FAWCETT, than SIMMONS, and even than MUNDEN in his present degenerate farcicality. What DRYDEN said of SHADWELL in an intellectual sense, may be applied to MR. LISTON in an imitative one, for he must be

> ——————— own'd, without dispute,
> Thro' all the realms of nonsense, absolute.

* A further elucidation of MR. LISTON's theatrical character by a comparison with that of MR. EMERY will be found in the next article.



MR. EMERY.

If education, or early habits, or a former profession will sometimes enable an actor to represent any peculiar character to more advantage, the same causes will often prevent his success in others, and it is most likely, that for one imitation which they may enliven, there will be several which will insensibly catch the habits of that one and therefore be injured. Thus INCLEDON the singer, whose merit raised him from the coarse vulgarity of a sea-life, and who has really a finer voice than any English singer on the stage, ever succeeds in descriptions of his former life, but when he attempts a love-song or any other more refined part of his science, he cannot help reminding us of the sailor; his voice swells into it's ancient jollity and indulges, if I may use the word, in that slang of sound, which expresses at once joviality, confidence, and vulgarity: after the finest tones in the world and in the midst perhaps of very pa-

thetic words he seems about to slide off into a *Right fol de ra* or some such energetic burden of ballad-singing.

It is most probably the same with MR. EMERY. I have been credibly informed, that he has a touch of country dialect off the stage, and as his early life is the most likely cause of such a habit, it may certainly be presumed that it is the cause also of his theatrical deficiency in variety and of the obstinate contradiction which this dialect makes to the truth of all his characters but his countrymen.

MR. EMERY is an actor of little variety, however he may attempt it or however he may be dissatisfied with his exquisite powers of rustic imitation. He does not err so grossly indeed as to attempt young gentlemen, like FAWCETT, but even his ungenteel or his vulgar old ones might convince him, if men could ever know themselves, that he can act nothing without rusticity. Independently of his dialect, he cannot shake off his natural activity of body and of mind and compose himself to the feebleness and dullness of age. His old *Count Curvoso* in the *Cabinet* looks like a tall lad with a round ruddy face who had painted his forehead with wrinkles for a frolic; and it was certainly a strange judgment in the manager of the Haymarket theatre, which

gave him the vulgar old peer in the *Heir at Law* and the young countryman to MUNDEN, who has nothing rustic about him, unless indeed some of his grins be like those merry monstrosities exhibited at country fairs through a horsecollar. The same deficiency in the imitation of age I have already observed of LISTON, so that our two principal rustics are in this respect unequal to the other good comedians.

It is in the general habits of rustics, personal, moral, and intellectual, that MR. EMERY displays his decided and great originality. To produce all the examples of this ability would be to write a list of all his rustic characters, for I do not know one in which he is not altogether excellent and almost perfect. But when an actor does not excel in many distinct classes of character, I do not think it necessary, in order to estimate his powers, to enumerate a great number of his performances, for there is seldom any difference in his representation of one class of persons but what is made by the difference of dialogue. EMERY's class of rustics may be divided into three parts, the serious, the comic, and the tragi-comic, and the three admirable examples which may be produced of this variety will suffice for a multitude of monotonous ones. Of that expression, which diverts with it's manner while it raises a serious im-

pression with it's sentiments, and which is therefore so difficult in it's complication, MR. EMERY exhibits a powerful instance in the character of *Farmer Ashfield* in *Speed the Plough*. Inferior actors indulge their want of discrimination in representing every countryman as a lounging vulgar boor, for as they catch externals only they are obliged to exaggerate them in order to supply the deficiency of a more thorough imitation. MR. EMERY understands all the gradations of rusticity: his *Farmer Ashfield*, though it occasionally raises our mirth by it's familiarity and it's want of town-manners, is manly and attractive of respect: like the master of a family, he always appears attentive to the concerns of those about him, and never breaks out of his natural cares and employments to amuse the audience at the expense of forgetting his character. In an actor, who excels chiefly in gross rusticity, this species of refinement might have well set bounds both to his own expectation of variety and to that of his audience; but the play called the *School of Reform* gave new light to his genius, and in the character of the rustic villain *Tyke* he astonished the town by a display of feeling and passion almost amounting to the most thrilling tragedy. His performance in this play I must call tragicomic, not because he displayed that amalgamation of the

humourous and the serious, which the word tragi-comedy in our age implies, but because, as it's ancient meaning signified, he excelled in alternate scenes of comedy and tragedy. This single display indeed would have induced me to rank MR. EMERY with the performers who have gained reputation both in tragedy and comedy, but I recollected that, however critics may talk about the sufficiency of terror and pity to create tragic delight, all ages have agreed by their own measure of approbation to demand a certain degree of refinement as a necessary recommendation of those feelings, and that when MR. EMERY had exhibited a new talent and raised an unexpected wonder for the moment, he had done as much as a tragedy rustic could do, for his dialect and his manners would inevitably have rendered his tragedy comic in a very short time. HUME, in his Dissertations, has thought this refinement so requisite, that he has in a great measure deduced the pleasurable effect of tragedy from the beauty of the poet's language rather than the nature of his characters, though this doctrine seems a curious disproportion of the means to the end, and the object of his enquiry appears to me still undiscovered. That such a refinement however is eminently desirable a few familiar recollections would convince us. Those tragic writers, who have ventured farthest into the familiarity of pri-

vate life, have always elevated their characters above the usual level of common life, particularly with regard to language: and with still greater care would they have avoided any national or local peculiarities of person or habit. *George Barnwell* for instance was a common city apprentice, but does he talk as apprentices usually do? or to equalize the case more with that of EMERY's *Tyke*, would the author have ventured to give him the cockney dialect? would not such a dialect, though it might have been endured at the first utterance and in some scene of peculiar suffering to the speaker, have totally deranged the gravity of the pit in a few moments? Every tragic effect however, short as it may be, which is possible to be produced from a vulgar character, MR. EMERY certainly produces from this. *Tyke* is a villanous rustic, who has not sufficient strength of mind to shake off his depraved habits though he is occasionally agonized by the tortures of conscience. It is in the scene where he describes the agony of his old father, as he stood upon the beach to witness his son's transportation, that he surprised us with this tragic originality. His description of their last adieu, of his parent kneeling to bless him just as the vessel was moving, of his own despair, the blood that seemed to burst from his eyes, and his fall of senselessness

to the ground, was given with so unexpected an elevation of manner, so wild an air of wretchedness, and with actions of such pitiable self-abhorrence, that in spite of his country dialect which he still very naturally preserved and the utter vulgarity of his personal appearance, the audience on the first night were electrified for the moment with the truest terror and pity. His haggard demeanour and the outcry of his despair live before me at this instant.

I scarcely know in what class of acting to place his performance of *Caliban* * in the *Tempest*, perhaps in that which I have ventured to call the humourous pathetic, for a great distinction must be made between those two styles which our language has indiscriminately called tragicomedy, between an alternation of the tragic and the comic, and that disagreement of the language with the speaker, the effect from the cause, or the end with the intention, which renders a real seriousness ludicrous. The humour of *Caliban* (though I think there are many persons, to whom this monster appears too much persecuted and too revengeful to be at all humourous) must rise from his roughness of manners and his infinite awe at the divinity of the sailor who had made him drunk, and this roughness as well as awe MR. EMERY

* See Appendix.

most inimitably displays, particularly in the vehement manner and high voice with which he curses *Prospero* and that thoughtful lowness of tone softened from it's usual hoarse brutality, with which he worships his new deity. MR. EMERY, notwithstanding the coarseness of style necessary to the parts he performs, is a truly poetical actor, and in all the varieties of his poet's flight keeps by his side with the quickest observation. In this character he again approaches to terrific tragedy, when he describes the various tortures inflicted on him by the magician and the surrounding snakes that "stare and hiss him into madness." This idea, which is truly the "fine frenzy" of the poet and hovers on that verge of fancy beyond which it is a pain even for poetry to venture, is brought before the spectators with all the loathing and violence of desperate wretchedness: the monster hugs and shrinks into himself, grows louder and more shuddering as he proceeds, and when he pictures the torment that almost turns his brain, glares with his eyes and gnashes his teeth with an impatient impotence of revenge.

I am afraid it is somewhat like anticlimax to descend to broad farce after all this display of terror; but the most natural excellence of EMERY is in the mixture of rustic ignorance and cunning, and of this mixture his *John Lump* in the *Re-*

view is an inimitable instance. In each successive scene, the fancy of the author has given him an opportunity of shewing his unwearied flow of nature and of humour. Whether he is recommending himself to *Mr. Deputy Bull* as a servant by a list of unnecessary rustic accomplishments, or bashfully attending to the supposed overtures of *Miss Grace Gaylove*, or felicitating himself, in a vain soliloquy, on the beauty of his person, he exhibits the same knowledge of every movement and sensation of gross rusticity. In this last scene, when he has just parted with the lady, and meditated a little, nothing can be better imagined than his half-smothered spluttering laughter of triumph at his fancied importance to the lady's heart. A piteous or joyous contempt of others, the result of rustic ignorance, is indeed one of his best expressions; and he is inimitable in that peculiarity of gesture which affects a superiority in sense or artifice, and announces the eagerness of vanity by preceding it's language; such, for instance, is the protrusion of chin and earnest self-satisfaction with which he commences a story or prepares himself to convince another by argument.

If our two stage-rustics, EMERY and LISTON, are compared, it will be found, that the former is more skilled in the habits and cunning of rusticity, and the latter in it's simplicity and ignorance.

EMERY has appropriated to himself the dialects and the personal peculiarities of countrymen; LISTON is the rustic merely because nothing so ignorant and so gaping is ever discovered in town. EMERY excels in vain insolence, in the fatigue of comprehending another, and in the meditation of a cunning answer; LISTON in the apparent inability to object, in a hopelessness of perception, and in the fatuity of mere astonishment. Their expression of vanity is in proportion to their expression of ignorance: what is the affectation of superiority in EMERY becomes an important self-conviction in LISTON. EMERY, full of whim and artifice, is the countryman who has associated with the geniuses of inns and has preserved his rusticity and his ignorance after acquiring a contempt for both; LISTON is the confirmed, inexperienced, and stupid bumpkin, with all the prejudices of unvaried locality and with not even sufficient intelligence to imbibe the manner and eccentricities of his neighbours. Upon the whole, LISTON is more dry in his humour, more effective with a little exertion and upon inefficient subjects, and altogether more unaffected; but the greater genius must certainly be allowed to EMERY, who exhibits a more discriminative minuteness and variety of expression, and who excels at once in the habits and the passions of the coun-

try. In proportion as an actor can pierce beyond externals into the human heart, so is he great in his profession. The actor of habits is a gardener, who raises elegant flowers and distributes gaudy parterres, but knows nothing beyond the surface of the earth. The actor of passions is a miner, who digs into the depth and darkness of the creation and brings to light it's most hidden and valuable stores.

MR. WEWITZER.

Wit is the same in all countries, because it springs from something nobler than the habits of mankind; but nothing shews more decisively the partial nature of humour than the ludicrous light in which one particular people views the manners of another. To an Englishman for instance nothing can be more droll than the vivacious habits of the French, while they are contemplated with the utmost gravity by an Italian or a Turk. If only what is French however afforded this species of pleasantry, much of it's zest might be attributed to the maliciousness of national antipathy; but, whether it be owing to the natural pride of islanders separated from the rest of the world, or more probably to the universal moderation observable in the actions and thoughts of our countrymen, every thing that presents a strong contract to English manners becomes laughably obnoxious to English taste. For this reason the English comedy

abounds in French, German, and other foreign characters, who are merely humourous in proportion as they differ from the habits of the audience either in dress or manner; a long pigtail exhibits a volume of droll meaning, and a little broken English is something eminently gratifying to the pride and learning of the galleries.

Since much of this humour, particularly when the object is a Frenchman, depends upon jerks of the hand, shrugs of the shoulder, a nasal tone, and a languid carelessness of eye, the actor has much more to do with it than the author; and it would be difficult to recollect a single character of the kind performed by MR. WEWITZER, our celebrated stage-foreigner, which would amuse in the closet beyond it's bad spelling.

Nothing however can be more diverting than the host of meaning with which MR. WEWITZER strengthens these personal vagaries; no Frenchman can be more lively or more important, no German possessed of more phlegmatic repose, no Jew of a countenance more satisfied with his own experience and cunning. But the various expression of their excellencies is as difficult to describe to the reader, as it is easy of comprehension to the spectator, nor is it much less difficult to criticise MR. WEWITZER comparatively either with others or with himself: there is no actor on

the stage who approaches his foreign accent and manner, and his characters are generally so uninteresting in the author and so totally dependant on his acting for their effect, that if he has any fault in this style it is the universal and equal humour which he gives to every thing foreign. I would instance however among a hundred others the character of the sycophant valet *Canton* in the *Clandestine Marriage*, as a specimen not only of his general manner but of his felicity in conferring an interest and effect on characters which in the closet are totally uninteresting and inefficient.

MR. WEWITZER however with all his humour does not stand in the higher rank of comedians, for he can imitate little else but habits, and even those must be foreign. He cannot represent any thing English with the least effect, and his fancy has resided so long among foreigners, that, like a traveller infatuated with the continent, he cannot help now and then using a foreign tone and manner when they are every way inappropriate. It is the worst of a comedian's profession, that those ridiculous habits which it is his peculiar talent to represent sometimes attach themselves, like a spaniel, to the person who handles them most roughly. This and the habit of quoting plays are the diseases of the stage, and they rise as naturally from the profession as the palsy from mines, and asthma from glass-houses and forges.

MR. JOHNSTONE.

AN Englishman laughs at the Irish as much as he does at the French, though his merriment at the former is more social and good humoured: the Frenchman becomes ridiculous to him for his frivolity, which inspires him with contempt, the Irishman for his blundering simplicity, which touches him with a degree of pity in the midst of his laughter. But it is enough in fact that an Irishman has a different sort of pronunciation and manner from his own, and the English stage must exhibit a set of Hibernian characters for his amusement. An actor, who is at once a native of Ireland and not overweeningly proud of his country's pure dialect or logical reasoning, is herefore in great request, and MR. JOHNSTONE as become an invaluable assistant to our modern farce-writers. The plays of MESSRS. COLMAN and CHERRY (concordia discors!) overflow with the incontinent loyalty and blunders of Irishmen;

and though the English mob have heard it's nation flattered and it's jest books repeated a thousand times over in the Irish tongue, their vanity still finds them inconceivably droll and satisfactory.

This nationality and extreme willingness to be pleased is accordingly very useful to such an actor, who with regard to the humour arising from mere dialect certainly requires no great powers. It is evident that the brogue of MR. JOHNSTONE has no more genius in it than a Frenchman's broken English; both speak it because they cannot help it. I mention this truth, because some frequenters of the theatre are apt to confound an actor's national habits with his acquired humour.

The pleasantry with which MR. JOHNSTONE enlivens this brogue is another thing. His open manner, his simplicity of attitude and gesture, and his variety of emphatic tone, are admirably adapted to frank Hibernian jollity; and the air of confidential repose on his audience which he assumes during his excellent Irish songs, with his occasional semitonic whining, is peculiarly original and characteristic. His imitation is confined to no description of Irishmen; he represents the blundering gentleman and the blundering servant with equal truth and humour, and assumes the gay officer, who blunders with elegance, and the

rustic, who blunders with vulgarity, with the same ease and adaptation of manner. His performance of *Sir Callaghan* in *Love-a-la-Mode* is an excellent specimen of the delicacy with which he mingles the restraint of the gentleman with the honest humour of the soldier, and of his skill in preserving our respect under those defects of dialect and speech which generally give the actor a kind of familiar inferiority to his audience. To this more refined humour he presents an inimitable contrast in the *Dennis Brulgruddery* of *John Bull* and the *Loony M'Twolter* of the *Review*, characters undoubtedly drawn with the strongest drollery by MR. COLMAN, who with all his erroneous condescension to the faults of the present stage is able perhaps to produce a more laughable farce than any English humourist on record. *Loony M'Twolter*, the haymaker, becomes with MR. JOHNSTONE a consummate picture of an Irish bog-trotter, sturdy, facetious, impudent, quarrelsome, good hearted, and above all blessed with a most sluggish complacency in his own powers of action. His smile of self-introduction when he comes to *Mr. Deputy Bull* after a place in his kitchen, his insolent familiarity of which he seems utterly unconscious, the air of serious secrecy with which he advises the old gentleman not to hire a man who is just announced, and his triumphant contempt of

the Deputy and his new servant when he is dismissed, almost convulse the audience with a succession of caricature, of which he may fairly share half the praise with the author.

These national peculiarities, while they hinder his success in any other character, give him that exclusive and prominent situation on the stage, which he maintains by the assistance of an original humour; and MR. JOHNSTONE will always preserve a considerable and deserved reputation. But his humour consists almost entirely in the representation of habits, and therefore he by no means rises to the genius of the more mental actors. His range of character also, though it is very wide in his own country, is in fact nothing elsewhere, and his effect therefore is very local, while it is not likely to be half so strong where he is even most understood as where he is not, for what drollery will Irishmen find in their own dialect? An actor, whose business it is to mimic into ridicule the peculiarities of his birth-place, must literally be one of those who have no honour in their own country.

MR. BLANCHARD.

A correct mediocrity has one eminent advantage over the most extravagant humour; it entitles it's possessor to more personal respect, and however the general lives of the actors may have reduced this respect, or the talents of certain performers have rendered it less necessary, it really gains more for an actor than the majority of the stage may perhaps be willing to imagine. It is always pleasing therefore to see an actor who, with considerable powers of buffoonery, can so far respect himself and his author as to keep his spirits within just bounds, and be rather proud of copying nature than vain enough to remind us eternally of himself. For this reason the unassuming and unaffected nature of MR. BLANCHARD is always welcome to the judicious, though he may not be received with as much riot from the galleries as MR. FAWCETT or any other speaking Harlequin. Let the natural actor always recollect, that buffoons meet with so much applause

chiefly because it is customary for the mob to be the noisest in their approbation; if it were the fashion for the boxes to be as unrestrained and as turbulent, and for the mob to assent merely with smiles, nature and wit would always obtain the shout.

Of MR. BLANCHARD however I cannot talk much, for he is not seen much. The performance, which has chiefly gained him his popularity, is the character of the *Marquis de Grand Chateau* in the musical toy-show of the *Cabinet*, and he certainly presents a very amusing picture of a stiff dotard with his affectation of energetic dignity and that pompous gallantry which he has so well contrasted with the ludicrous turn out of the toes. This character indeed is so truly original, that even MR. MATHEWS has been able to add nothing new to it's representation, and with every allowance for second impressions, he certainly is the less amusing in proportion as he deviates from MR. BLANCHARD'S style.

MR. BLANCHARD has a perpetual catch with his right arm which he generally holds as if he had been accustomed to wear a sling: this trick has not the excuse of being even a common bad habit off the stage, and he should certainly endeavour to rectify an error which seems the only personal one he has got. But perhaps it is the

the more obstinate for that reason. These habits make a stronger impression upon the spectator's mind than even the spectator himself imagines. I have generally found, that when I sit down to think of an actor's style or indeed when the idea of any actor is presented to my mind, he invariably appears before me with some attitude or gesture that marks his accustomed manner, and the analysis of this attitude or gesture instantly discloses to me some habitual fault or beauty of his style. Thus if a frequenter of the theatre were to think suddenly of MR. LEWIS, he would unconsciously figure to himself the easy flutter, the short, knowing respiration, and the complacent nods of that lively actor. Contrast him with the idea of MR. KEMBLE, and there rises before you a figure of melancholy dignity, dealing out a most measured speech in sepulchral tones and a pedantic pronunciation, and injuring what he has made you feel by the want of feeling himself.

MR. DOWTON.

If we are to agree with Dr. Johnson, that genius is the power of a naturally strong intellect accidentally directed to one particular object, and that it would excel in any attainment which peculiarly excited it's attention, it will be difficult to decide, what accident could have directed an universal genius to so many objects at once, what concentration of casualties could have made Garrick so equally excellent in a hundred different characters, or Voltaire so equally delightful in a hundred kinds of writings. The most prominent argument however against such a definition is the wrong judgment which men of genius have so often conceived of their own powers: their attention has been directed to object after object without the least success, till at length they have suited their powers where they had neither an expectation nor a wish to suit them. This is the perpetual case on the stage. Mr. Bannister at one period of his earlier

days almost confined himself to lofty tragedy; both MR. KEMBLE and MRS. SIDDONS have flattered themselves they were comedians, and indeed there is hardly a good performer on the stage who has not at some time or other in the same way mistaken inclination for ability.

MR. DOWTON has shared the errors as well as the genius of his contemporaries. If there is no actor living who can represent the testiness of age and the passionate feeling of impatient honesty with half his felicity, there is at the same time no actor who imitates his inferiors with worse success. I recollect but one character in low comedy, that of *King Arthur* in *Tom Thumb*, which he sustains with any power; and this character is of a peculiar kind of humour not usual with vulgar comic actors and not difficult I should imagine even with professed tragedians; indeed if the great requisite in mock-heroic acting is a serious manner opposed to ludicrous words, it will not be found very difficult to any performer. But why MR. DOWTON, who cannot use his jaws like a piece of Indian-rubber, should attempt to grin like MUNDEN, or why with neither an iron voice nor a brazen countenance, he should condescend to copy MR. FAWCETT, is totally inexplicable. In fact his powers will scarcely bend to any expression that is not elicited by the stronger emo-

tions that approximate to tragedy and which are comic in proportion only as they are familiar, or extreme, or unreasonable, or strangly contrasted with their object. He is therefore a comedian of very superior powers in his happier characters, since he catches the feelings rather than the habits of men, and I really never lamented an actor's want of self-knowledge so much as when I saw so true a genius degrading his abilities and his fame by aping the uncouth levities of MR. FAWCETT in the part of *Doctor Pangloss*. His farcical servants and sailors are not a jot the more natural or more facetious; he always appears above them; his emotions are too refined and his faces not even passably monstrous.

But who is so impressive, so striking, so thrilling, as this actor in scenes of angry perturbation or of anger subdued by the patience or pleasantry of it's object? His *Captain Cape* in the *Old Maid* is a rough miniature of his *Sir Anthony Absolute* in the *Rivals*, and both are imitable portraits of a mind naturally good, indulging itself in bursts of extravagant anger. Most actors are content with straining their eyeballs, protruding their lips, and pounding the air with one arm, to express their rage; in DOWTON you see all the approaches, the changes, and the effects of that passion, which becomes impotent by it's very power: most actors

are content to stare with stupid inaction at their interlocutor, while he is combating or deprecating their rage; DOWTON still preserves the great feature of rage, impatience, he twists about his fingers, changes his attitude and his gesture, mutters hastily with his lips, turns away at intervals from the speaker with a mouth of contempt, or seems unable to wait for his conclusion. The scene with his son *Captain Absolute* in the *Rivals*, where he insists on the latter's marriage, is for this reason the masterpiece of extravagant anger. But then, when his son has won upon his feelings or suddenly complies with his demand, who at the same time can drop with such a fall of nature from the height of passion to the most soft emotions and the most social pleasantry? His expression of satisfaction with another, his grateful shake of the hand, and his hurried thanks breaking through the intervals of overpowering joy, exhibit the perfection of social enjoyment.

But it is not in simple passions only that MR. DOWTON excels; in the mixed emotions of anger and tenderness, and in the testiness of good-hearted old age, he has proved himself superior not only to the face-making MUNDEN, but perhaps to any actor in the recollection of the present times. Of this union of opposite feelings his *Old Dornton* in the *Road to Ruin* and his *Abednego*

in the *Jew and the Doctor* are sufficient examples. MUNDEN, who really has a considerable share of feeling, injures his *Dornton* as he does all his characters with the most preposterous buffoonery: he hurts alike his rage and his tenderness, his violent, his soft, and his comic expression with this studious farce, because he renders it evident to the whole house that he is not sufficiently occupied with himself to give a good portrait of himself, or rather perhaps, that he is too much occupied with himself to give a good portrait of his author's personage. DOWTON thinks of nothing but his immediate character, and this is a secret by which even indifferent actors might gain a much better effect with their audience. An actor in fact thinks of two incompatible things at once when he is representing the author's character and studying his own personal one, as the droll MR. MUNDEN or the merry MR. FAWCETT: a portrait painter in the act of taking another's likeness might as well be so infatuated with himself as to mingle a few dashes of his own: to be sure, people would then say "Here is a curious fancy piece enough!" but what would the intended original say?

DOWTON's changes from the irritable to the yielding, from the angry to the tender, in old *Dornton*, have so much nature, that a spectator

can with difficulty imagine them to be *designed* for effect. The gradual faltering of his voice from violence to softness, as he is gradually won from testiness or anger, is like those beautiful semitones whose dropping difference is scarcely perceivable in a fine singer; and in the same manner, his rise from sullenness to gaiety is almost as imperceptible in it's individual gradation as the hundred different tones that melt in ascension on the ear when a vessel is filled at the spring. In *Dornton* however he always preserves the air of the venerable gentleman, in the *Abednego* of the *Jew and the Doctor* he shews with what nature he can still preserve these emotions with even an air of vulgarity. The remonstrances of the humane Jew, when he complains that his visitor has hurt his feelings, his air of honest pride gradually giving way to feelings of humiliation, and his powerless voice at length faultering into tears, are equalled by nothing but the sudden start of consolation and eagerness with which he enquires what *the gentleman asks for his gold-headed cane.* If his Israelitish dialect is not so correct as that of WEWITZER, it is nevertheless inferior to WEWITZER'S only, and in every other respect it is the first performance of it's kind that I have seen. I must lament indeed that I have not seen either himself or MR. BANNISTER in the character of *Sheva* in MR. CUMBERLAND'S comedy of the *Jew*,

since this character, I should imagine, must comprise all the excellencies of his acting, his anger, his tenderness, his united anger and tenderness, and his unaffected force of humour, and it would have been curious to compare the two performers in their full rivalry of excellence. But I mention this comedy, which has done MR. CUMBERLAND'S heart so much honour,* to notice the

* The soul of a Jew, as it has usually been represented on the stage, is a mere mass of selfish corruption, and in fact, the Israelitish tribe has been so driven by the prejudices of society into a perpetual watchfulness after it's immediate interest, that a Jewish mind is very often a mere camera obscura in which every surrounding object is represented in all it's life, motion, and point of view, while the passing picture is completely hidden from outward observation and the room itself too confined to admit much sociality: in short, a Jew must become rich in order not to be utterly contemptible. But this is evidently not the fault of the Jew, *quatenus* Jew, as a logician would say, or merely because he is a Jew; there are at this moment men infinitely attached to the Jewish religion and customs, who have the art of getting rich and yet of preserving that liberality, which the weaker Israelite is afraid even to profess from a fear of the incredulity of his persecution; his enemies, he thinks, could exclaim with additional alarm against his miserly designs, were he to pretend generosity. Of this weakness and of really consummate generosity MR. CUMBERLAND has composed his Jew, and if he has drawn the picture somewhat too strongly even for the most persecuted and the most liberal of men, he has done the greater honour to his own amiable feelings, and to his liberality as an author, an Englishman, and a Christian.

very deserved encomium on MR. DOWTON in the author's memoirs of himself published last year. The praise is general, and it comes from a writer grateful for assistance, but it is interesting because it is MR. CUMBERLAND'S, and valuable because it is true. "It has also served," says the author, speaking of the part of *Shylock*, "as a stepping-stone to the stage for an actor, who in my judgment (and I am not afraid of being singular in that opinion) stands amongst the highest of his profession: for if quick conception, true discrimination, and the happy faculty of incarnating the idea of his poet, are properties essential in the almost undefinable composition of a great and perfect actor, these and many more will be found in MR. DOWTON*." I would not be so great a friend of the bathos, as to say any thing after this.

* Memoirs of RICHARD CUMBERLAND written by himself. Lackington, 1806. 4to. p. 514.

MR. MATHEWS.

THOSE comedians are infinitely mistaken, who imagine that mere buffoonery or face-making is a surer method of attaining public favour than chastened and natural humour. A monstrous grin, that defies all description or simile, may raise a more noisy laughter, but as I have before observed, the merest pantomime clown will raise a still noisier: laughter does not always express the most satisfied enjoyment, and there is something in the ease and artlessness of true humour that obtains a more lasting though a more gradual applause: it is like a rational lover, who allows confidence and extravagant mirth to catch a woman's eye first, but wins his way ultimately from the very want of qualities which please merely to fatigue. While such an actor therefore as DOWTON will attempt buffooneries in which he neither can nor ought to succeed, it is no small credit to MR. MATHEWS, that he has the judgment to avoid in general what he really can

exhibit with the greater effect. This is the proper pride of an actor who has a greater respect for the opinion of the boxes than of the galleries; this is the laudable ambition that would rather be praised by those who are worthy of respect themselves than by a clamourous mob who in fact applaud their own likeness in the vulgarity and nonsense so boisterously admired.

Such a judgment is the more praise-worthy in MR. MATHEWS, as his principal excellence is the representation of officious valets and humourous old men, two species of character that with most actors are merely buffoons in livery and buffoons with walking-sticks. His attention to correctness however by no means lessens his vivacity, but it is the vivacity of the world not of the stage; it seems rather his nature than his art, and though I dare say all actors have their hours of disquiet, and perhaps more than most men, yet he has not the air of one who elevates his sensations the moment he enters the stage and drops them the instant he departs. It is a very common and a very injurious fault with actors to come before the audience with a manner expressive of beginning a task; they adjust their neckcloths and hats as if they had dressed in a hurry, look about them as much as to say "What sort of a house have I got this evening?" and commence their speeches

in a tone of patient weariness, as if they contemplated the future labours of the evening. This is a frequent error with MR. H. JOHNSTON, and a most peculiar one with MR. C. KEMBLE, who often seems to have just arrived from a fatiguing walk. MR. MATHEWS makes his appearance neither with this indifference on the one hand, nor on the other with that laboured mirth which seems to have been lashed into action like a top and which goes down like a top at regular intervals. If therefore he does not amaze like many inferior actors with sudden bursts of broad merriment, he is more equable and consistent in his humour and inspires his audience with a more constant spirit of chearfulness. Such a chearfulness is the most desirable effect in every comic performer, and this feeling is one of the sensations which render us more truly pleased with comedy than with farce: it is more agreeable to reason, because it leaves room for thinking; it is removed from violence, which always carries a degree of pain into the more exquisite pleasures; it is more like the happiness that we may attain in real life, and therefore more fitted to dispose us to an enjoyment of our feelings.

The principal fault in the general style of MR. MATHEWS is a redundancy of bodily motion approaching to restlessness, which I have sometimes

thought to have been a kind of nervousness impatient of public observation; but I think he has repressed this considerably within these few months, and if it be owing to want of confidence, the stage is not a place to increase any of the more bashful feelings. This fault however, like MR. KEMBLE'S stiffness in *Penruddock*, becomes a beauty in his performance of the restless *Lying Valet*, and of *Risk* in *Love laughs at Locksmiths*, who are both in a perpetual bustle of cheating and contrivance. Possibly it may be the frequency of his performance in characters of intrigue that originally led him to indulge it, for there is yet another character, that of the intriguing servant in the farce of *Catch him who Can*, in which he is at full liberty to indulge it. In this servant he gives a specimen of that admirable power of mimickry, in which he rivals MR. BANNISTER. I believe there were many in the theatre who had much difficulty to recognise him in his transformation into the Frenchman, and for alteration of manner, tone, and pronunciation it certainly was not inferior to the most finished deceptions of that great comedian. As this kind of deception indeed depends chiefly upon a disguise of the voice, one would imagine it ought not to be very difficult to an actor, one of whose first powers should be a flexibility of tone; but this flexibility becomes

valuable on our stage for it's rarity, for it is curious enough to observe, that we have not a single tragedian or female performer who can at all disguise the voice, and of all our comedians, who really ought to excel in this point, MR. BANNISTER and MR. MATHEWS seem the only two who can thus escape from themselves with any artifice: many of the comic actors, as MUNDEN, SIMMONS, BLANCHARD, LISTON, JOHNSTONE, WEWITZER, and particularly FAWCETT, seem blessed with such honest throats as to be incapable of the slightest deception.

The old age of MR. MATHEWS is like the rest of his excellencies, perfectly unaffected and correct; the appearance of years he manages so well, that many of his admirers, who have never seen him off the stage, insist that he is an elderly man, and the reason of this deception is evident: most of our comedians in their representation of age either make no alteration of their voice, and like antiquarian cheats, palm a walking-stick or a hat upon us for something very ancient, or sink into so unnatural an imbecility that they are apt on occasion to forget their tottering knees and bent shoulders, and like VERTUMNUS in the poet are young and old in the turn of a minute. MATHEWS never appears to wish to be old; time seems to have come to him, not he to time, and as

he never, where he can avoid it, makes that show of feebleness which the vanity of age always would avoid, so he never forgets that general appearance of years, which the natural feebleness of age could not help. Our old men of the stage are in general of one unvarying age in all their various characters, as in the case of MUNDEN for instance, who though he imitates the appearance of a hearty old gentleman with much nature, is seldom a jot the older or the younger than his usual antiquity, whatever the author might have led us to imagine. The two characters of *Don Manuel* in *She would and She would not* and of *Old Philpot* in the *Citizen* are sufficient examples of the ease with which MR. MATHEWS alters his years and of the general excellencies of his old age. In the former piece he is a naturally chearful old man, whose humour depends much on the humour of others, and who is overcome alternately with gaiety and with despair, as he finds himself treated by those about him. The voice of MR. MATHEWS, were we to shut our eyes, would be enough to convince us of his age in this character, and of his disposition too; there is something in it unaccountably petty and confined, while at the same time it appears to make an effort of strength and jollity, and when his false pitch of spirits meets with a sudden downfall,

nothing can be more natural than the total dissolution of his powers of voice, or the restless despondency with which he yields himself to a hundred imaginary miseries: when his spirits are raised again and his excessive joy gradually overcomes itself by it's own violence, the second exertion of his fatigued talkativeness and of his excessive laughter reduces him to mere impotence; he sinks into his chair; and in the last weariness of a weak mind and body, cannot still refrain from the natural loquacity of old age, but in the intervals of oppressed feeling attempts to speak when he has not only nothing to say, but when it is perfectly painful to him to utter a word. In this character therefore, Mr. Mathews exhibits all the gradations of the strength and weakness of declining years; in that of *Philpot*, he settles himself into a confirmed and unresisting old age: his feeble attitudes, his voice, his minutest actions, are perfectly monotonous, as become a money-getting dotard, whose soul is absorbed in one mean object: his limbs contracted together are expressive of the selfish closeness of the miser, and in his very tone of utterance, so sparing of it's strength and so inward, he seems to retire into himself.

From the general performances however of Mr. Mathews, I had been induced to consider

him as an actor of habits rather than of passions; and as the present essay originally stood, I had classed him in a rank much inferior to BANNISTER and DOWTON. But one of his late performances raised his genius so highly in my estimation, that I cancelled the original paragraph on purpose to do justice to his *Sir Fretful Plagiary* in the *Critic*, to a performance which has proved his knowledge of the human heart, has given it's true spirit to one of the most original characters of the first wit of our age, and has even persuaded the ancient dramatic connoisseurs to summon up the claps of former times: nay, some of the old gentlemen, in the important intervals of snuff, went so far as to declare that the actor approached PARSONS himself. We are generally satisfied, when an actor can express a single feeling with strength of countenance; but to express two at once, and to give them at the same time a powerful distinctness, belongs to the perfection of his art. Nothing can be more admirable than the look of MR. MATHEWS, when the severe criticism is detailed by his malicious acquaintance. While he affects a pleasantry of countenance, he cannot help betraying his rage in his eyes, in that feature, which always displays our most predominant feelings: if he draws the air to and fro through his teeth, as if he was perfectly assured of

his own pleasant feelings, he convinces every body by his tremulous and restless limbs that he is in absolute torture; if the lower part of his face expands into a painful smile, the upper part contracts into a glaring frown which contradicts the ineffectual good humour beneath; every thing in his face becomes rigid, confused, and uneasy; it is a mixture of oil and vinegar, in which the acid predominates; it is anger putting on a mask that is only the more hideous in proportion as it is more fantastic. The sudden drop of his smile into a deep and bitter indignation, when he can endure sarcasm no longer, completes this impassioned picture of *Sir Fretful;* but lest his indignation should swell into mere tragedy, MR. MATHEWS accompanies it with all the touches of familiar vexation: while he is venting his rage in vehement expressions, he accompanies his more emphatic words with a closing thrust of his buttons, which he fastens and unfastens up and down his coat; and when his obnoxious friend approaches his snuff-box to take a pinch, he claps down the lid and turns violently off with a most malicious mockery of grin. These are the performances and the characters, which are the true fame of actors and dramatists. If our farcical performers and farcical writers could reach this refined satire, ridicule would vanish before them, like breath from a polished knife.

MISS POPE.

The tragic stage is always a step above nature; for the imitation of tragedy, paradoxical as the phrase may seem, must be somewhat imperfect in it's resemblance to real life in order to be pleasing, not only because the spectators would lose sight of the emotion, considered in it's imitative powers, from which some critics have deduced all the pleasure arising from tragedy, but because in proportion as they lost sight of this imitation, they would be awake to a sorrow too apparently real to be softened into a pleasing effect. Luckily for nature indeed, our actors have little occasion to study this elevation above men and manners: for the poet has already lifted them sufficiently, either with his verse, or his declamation, or some other uncommonness of human language, as well as with the intervals of acts, which allow the spectators leisure to collect their thoughts. The tragic performer therefore, though he attend carefully to the poetry, ought still to imitate nature as closely as

possible in passages of emotion and passion, if it were merely to correct the artificial effect of the poet's writing, which is always sufficient to give him the necessary elevation, and unless softened, would always be in danger of lifting him too abruptly above the standard of humanity.

But in comedy such an elevation is totally unnecessary and injurious; firstly, because it excites too little passion to carry our enthusiasm beyond a sense of it's imitation; secondly, because if it did thus transport us, the sensations it would inspire, would be the reverse of painful and alarming; and thirdly, because it's chief end is satire, and what is not a just picture of human manners will never be recognized or at least felt as a likeness either by those whom it is intended to reprove or those whom it should rouse to a reproof of others. Caricature for this reason is very justly confined by good authors to farce, which professes nothing but to raise merriment, and though some writers of huge farces may call their productions comedy, yet the world invariably recognizes them for what they are, and would as soon look for it's own image in their kind of satire, as a beauty would search for her likeness at the back of her looking-glass. For the same reason therefore, the actor should confine his caricature to farce, otherwise he totally destroys that end of the poet

which it is his business to promote. If the character too is extremely natural and well-drawn, he contradicts his own sentiments and deeds by farce, and thus the union between an actor and his character becomes just as unseasonable and ridiculous, as the assistance of a boisterous fellow who to help his friend from the ground overturns him by his aukward officiousness.

I have been led into these reflections by a contemplation of MISS POPE's genius, which proves how infinitely a comedian can please without the least tincture of grimace or buffoonery, or the slightest opposition to nature. She exhibits indeed such a perfect freedom from the cant and trick of the stage, that her education in MR. GARRICK's juvenile theatre allows no argument for the friends of such an institution, since her excellencies are evidently the effect of natural genius and not of any system of education. A theatre of this kind can be of no use but to instruct it's actors in the mere business of the stage, and MISS POPE, I believe, is the only good performer either in England or France that has been thus educated. Such a stage can never supply that observation of life which is one of the first requisites towards the representation of men and manners; it is evident too that however excellently children may perform, considered as chil-

dren, they can never personate a more advanced age for that very reason, and even if they could contrive to imitate men they would merely disgust us the more because they were no longer children. Of what service then is a juvenile theatre? why, it hurts the health of children by forcing them into bad hours, it hurts their minds by giving them a premature knowledge of seducing vices, it takes away in short that lovely simplicity whose greatest charm is it's inexperience, and without which childhood becomes a mere effort at manhood, contemptible for it's want of power and infinitely pitiable for it's want of modesty. If Miss Pope has escaped all this, it is owing to that excellent sound sense which has taught her to avoid the most common errors of her profession. But what has become of all the other persons educated in this manner? If their early habits are not sufficient to make them fit for the stage they will at the same time render them unfit for almost every other profession, and what is to become of these, especially if they are females, whose very passion for bustle has made them indolent, and for reading, unwise? I do not speak from momentary consideration, for I have eagerly sifted the subject before;* there was an attempt last year to

* See Appendix.

establish in this metropolis what was called, an academic theatre; it's proprietors, some of whom were fathers of the children, instructed the infant performers in the most iniquitous plays of our degraded wits, and it will ever be the honest pride of my heart that, by the confession of these very men, it's dissolution was materially owing to the ridicule of the NEWS.

Neither these dangers, nor the earliest as well as greatest praise that an actress could receive, have had any effect on the steady, unassuming, and unaffected genius of MISS POPE, of whom CHURCHILL, in the ancient character of poet and prophet united, and in the midst of the most galling satire upon others, spoke his perfect approbation.

> With all the native vigour of sixteen,
> Among the merry group conspicuous seen,
> See lively POPE advance in jig and trip,
> Corinna, Cherry, Honeycomb, and Snip.
> Not without art, but yet to nature true,
> She charms the town with humour just, yet new.
> Chear'd by her promise, we the less deplore
> The fatal time when CLIVE shall be no more.
>
> ROSCIAD.

This anticipation of MISS POPE's resemblance to MRS. CLIVE, who excelled in hoydens and romps as well as intriguing chambermaids,

does not seem to have been perfectly justified in the former character; but in the latter we ourselves can witness to that lively nature which seems determined to survive her very powers, and the picture of MRS. CLIVE'S genius, if not of her characters, might still be drawn for MISS POPE:

> In spite of outward blemishes she shone
> For humour fam'd and humour all her own.
> Easy, as if at home, the stage she trod,
> Nor sought the critic's praise nor fear'd his rod.
> Original in spirit and in ease
> She pleas'd by hiding all attempts to please.

It has not been my fortune to see MISS POPE in her former days and characters, but if her humour is still so powerful, when her powers of voice and of action have become so weak, it is easy to imagine her former excellence. Her genius however is of a very lasting nature for it does not depend upon bodily exertion. The stage, as CHURCHILL says with respect to MRS. CLIVE, appears to be her own room: she never indulges in that excess of action which is intended to supply the want of active countenance, and which would be so astounding to Englishmen in real life; she never talks to the audience, she does not exhibit all she can when her character will not warrant

the display, and with the same judgment she never affects what she cannot do. One of her great beauties is a most judicious emphasis of speech that unites the qualities of reading and of talking; for it has all the strength of the one tempered by the familiarity of the other. Her general style of acting indeed may be termed emphatic, not because like MRS. DAVENPORT, who is a very sensible actress in other respects, she digs, as it were, into particular words with her voice and her action, but because she relieves with much art the uniform temperance of her manner by that variety of tone which appears the natural result of a person's obedience to feelings without any attempt either to repress or to elevate them. This is peculiarly observable in her performance of *Mrs. Candour* in the *School for Scandal*, in which her affected sentiments are so inimitably hidden by the natural turns of her voice, that it is no wonder her scandal carries perfect conviction to every body around her. Her humour is perfectly adapted to this affectation of truth, for it is of that dry sort which a person of little judgment might mistake for seriousness, and it is so perfectly equalized with her immediate feelings, that in scenes of cool contemptuous defiance or of anger affecting coolness, as in the character of *Lady Courtland* in the *School for*

Friends, she never passes those limits at which the actor's adherence to his author ends, and his mere wish to please the audience commences.

In parts of mere farce, like that of stupid *Audrey* in *As You Like It*, MISS POPE must yield, I think, to MRS. MATTOCKS, but in true comic humour and in temperate unaffected nature she yields to no actress on the stage, and it is a very considerable praise to her judgment and her general manners that in the present rare gentility of the stage she is the only natural performer of the old gentlewoman. With features neither naturally good nor flexible, she manages a surprising variety of expression, and with a voice originally harsh and now enfeebled by age, her variety of tone is still more surprising. None of her deficiencies in short are acquired, and she contrives that they shall injure none of her excellencies. With perpetual applause to flatter her and a long favouritism to secure her, she has no bad habits; and when even the best of our actors are considered, it is astonishing how much praise is contained in that single truth.

MRS. MATTOCKS.

GREAT comic powers may easily be recognized, though their possessor should sometimes degenerate into farce: nature and the true genius of acting are so amalgamated, that as long as a particle of the latter remains it will be found to contain something of the former. Such a genius injured by farce is like gold in the hands of the beater: however gaudy and glaring it's effect may become, it is still brilliant: however it's massiveness may be attenuated into a mere superficies, it is still the remnant of a noble metal.

The powers of MR. MUNDEN for instance, however he may fritter them into worthlessness, are originally of sterling value. MRS. MATTOCKS, though she is apt to become flippant and farcical, has not so widely mistaken breadth for solidity, and therefore her genius for true comedy is more discoverable.

The comic powers of MRS. MATTOCKS indeed are originally not unlike those of MISS POPE; yet the difference between the two actresses is most forcibly apparent. The fact is, that MRS. MATTOCKS is more theatrical, and MISS POPE, who affects nothing, more natural. Many of their audience may consider the one actress quite as easy and natural as the other, because she is as free from lameness, because she never halts in her style or makes an apparent effort to produce effect; but a discriminating eye will instantly separate the easiness which trusts to Nature, and that which is produced by a confidence in theatrical art. In the one case the performer seems to do nothing but obey his inspiration; in the other he bends it to his conceit or his habitual peculiarities: however vehement or effective therefore this power may appear, it really possesses less of enthusiasm than a pure obedience to nature, because the mind is evidently less occupied with what it can bend to it's own habits than with a sensation that entirely absorbs and governs it.

I cannot illustrate this difference better than by a comparison of our two comic painters, SMIRKE and WILKIE, both of whom excel in a knowledge of the human mind and a powerful command of humourous expression. Though you recognize in SMIRKE's characters every habit and emotion he

personifies, the acquaintance is not commenced entirely by yourself; they force themselves on your notice by that kind of double humour, which anticipates observation while it seems busied with its own concerns: WILKIE's characters ask nothing and they gain every thing, they have none of that *looking out* of a picture, which MR. SMIRKE, however he may have corrected it by avoiding the gross staring of the Dutch figures has still maintained by attitudes and grimaces almost equally compulsive of observation: the characters of SMIRKE in their most domestic retirement always appear to have a consciousness and a wish of being overlooked; those of WILKIE preserve all that air of abstraction and employment, which persons occupied with their own affairs and surrounded by the walls of a room would naturally maintain. The little therefore which SMIRKE gains by their obtrusiveness of pencil, he loses by the confusion necessarily produced in characters which contradict their own actions and business; but WILKIE obtains our approbation or what may be called the artificial end of the painter by confining the action of his characters to their natural one, and by neglecting the spectator adds to the strength and unity of the spectacle: the one meets and solicits our eye for applause; the other waits for it without affectation and gains it with-

out effort: SMIRKE in short is the theatrical painter; he studies not so much to observe as to be observed: WILKIE is the painter of nature, he draws from mankind, rather than for them. Luckily for true and well-directed genius, the world in it's admiration of genius is like a delicate lover, and both for the sake of it's own reputation as well as activity, would rather pursue than be pursued, would rather detect the correct, the rational, the unobtrusive, than be deceived into a momentary vehemence of amazement by the glaring and the forward. Nothing can be a better instance of this delicacy in the true connoisseur, than the unchanging and unequalled honours of the divine RAPHAEL, whose beauties win upon our judgment and our feelings the more they are contemplated, but produce less perhaps of sudden effect than any great painter on record.

Such is the comparative excellence of the actor, and as MR. SMIRKE, had he obtained an earlier and a better judgment, possesses sufficient powers perhaps to have equalled his present superiors, so might a more genuine comedy have been attained by MRS. MATTOCKS or by any performer whose real genius has been distorted by the injudicious fondling of admirers. MRS. MATTOCKS has too much judgment ever to degenerate into mere caricature, except when it is her author's

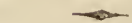
fault, as in the part of *Miss Clementina Allspice* in MR. MORTON'S *Way to get Married;* her chief fault is in the obtrusive force which she gives to all her characters, and in an extension of originally well proportioned expression to a breadth beyond it's basis: in this respect she resembles MUNDEN. In her performance, for instance, of the intriguing *Betty Hint* in the *Man of the World*, she personifies with the happiest effect the breathless anxiety and hushed communications of the mischief-maker; her expressive stare at the beginning of her speeches, prophetic of her interlocutor's amazement, her very preparatory swallow (excuse me this vulgarism) as if she were unable to commence her direful tales, and the pretended gaiety of hurry with which she slurs over her real want of information as though it were a confirmed knowledge of facts, form a picture of great variety and truth: but she is not satisfied with all this, broad as it is in it's correctness; she must obtain the same noisy laughter which MR. FAWCETT and MR. MUNDEN command, and like the Japanese idolaters, make a sacrifice of her reason to a set of grins and grimaces: every expression is pushed beyond it's end, her vivacity screams, her stare becomes tragic, and her hurry maddens into mere gal biing. Thus, like the actors she condescends to imitate, she fixes herself

in every petty habit immediately applicable or not, which she finds applauded; as MR. MUNDEN has his twist of the jaws at the conclusion of his sentences, and MR. FAWCETT his grating hem, so MRS. MATTOCKS must indulge herself in a kind of satisfactory giggling, which she sometimes with artificial conciseness terminates by a sudden gravity that certainly forms a very ludicrous though a very farcical contrast.

I have been the more surprised at this defalcation of MRS. MATTOCKS from true comedy, because no actress seems to understand her author better; so that her farce cannot be the juggling of ignorance to avoid scrutiny. In the character of the housekeeper in the *Tale of Mystery*, she proved herself capable of a seriousness and a feeling, particularly in her depressed and shrinking relation of the murder, which no performer of mere farce could attempt to reach.

It must be confessed that MRS. MATTOCKS has all the powers of an excellent comic actress, and age does not seem to have impaired them either bodily or mentally; her eye is still full of liveliness, her face and her voice of variety, and in a much better sense than it was remarked of another, she may be said to have "a head to conceive and a hand to execute any mischief."

MISS MELLON.



THE dearth of genteel females has long been a subject of complaint against the English stage, and it certainly appears surprising in a nation so celebrated for that delicate mixture of reserve and frankness which constitutes the charm of female manners. But if the cause of this dearth be considered, perhaps we shall be more surprised to recollect so many actresses who have attained these manners on the stage, since it arises for the most part from their very profession. It is evident that a female must entirely get rid of the natural timidity of her sex before she can appear in all her powers before a miscellaneous and expectant multitude, and though this natural timidity may in some measure be supplied in real life by that outward reserve with which a woman might artfully conceal a masculine mind, yet there is a something beyond propriety of demeanor, beyond even personal dignity, which must separate feminine from masculine gentility.

By that necessary union then of delicacy, of frankness, and of reserve, which renders the social female so lovely, an actress who aspires to the lady, must be judged; and MISS MELLON, I am afraid, possesses nothing but the frankness; she has sufficient easiness for mere fashion, but such an easiness is the result of confidence not of a happy propriety of temper and education; she has a fund of vivacity, but whether she is exercising her skill in raillery or not, her sprightliness has always a vulgar shortness of speech and manner, a something almost amounting to snappishness, which lessens her amiableness in proportion as it increases her humour. This fault is very observable in her representation of *Volante* in the *Honey Moon*, a character nevertheless of rather a confident levity, and from it's plain-spoken manner very well adapted to MISS MELLON'S style; but what might be a beauty in this performance, if confined to it's immediate seasons for exertion, becomes a glaring error from it's obstinacy and misapplication. It cannot be denied, and indeed it is extremely natural, that the freedom of intercourse between the actor and actress, though it may be perfectly void of criminality, must nevertheless do away those nice distinctions in behaviour between the sexes, which are necessary to their distinguishment by others, and perhaps is

will be found that the first cause of a female's ill success in the representation of perfect gentility is the want of that sexual consciousness, if I may use the expression, which does not so much think of itself as it feels a retiring sensation at the levity or the officiousness of men.

The happy peculiarity which distinguishes MISS MELLON from the multitude of the London performers, is her ease and artifice in the chambermaid or the unpolished girl. The shortness of her manner suits admirably well with the pertness and decision of the one, and her vivacious frankness with the universal carelessness of the other. Nor is it in the more prominent qualities only of abigails that she excels; she catches with the nicest discrimination their probable touches of character and manner as they might be excited upon unusual occasions, and after the fac-simile of DE WILDE I need not attempt to paint her restless bashfulness as *Lucy* in the *School for Friends*, when she is courted by the *Quaker:* if MATHEWS makes his advances to her sympathy by a smiling complacency that gradually outshines his solemnity, if he woos her hand into his own and by a daring manœuvre raises it and cherishes it to his bosom, nothing can be more humourously replied than the momentary glances of acknowledgment which she lifts to his momentary con-

templation of her charms, or the unconscious air and oppressed feelings with which she bites the corner of her apron. For easiness and freedom of manner I would instance her performance of the heroine in the *Apprentice*, especially in the scene where she remonstrates from the balcony against the tragic proceedings of her lover; the tone of her voice is very naturally divided between endearment and indifference, and by the security of her lounge as she hangs over the rails, and the leisure of her conversation, she completely avoids the air of a performer before an audience.

But when I mention easiness of manner, I must not forget the perfect nature of a young actress named GRANT, who appeared some little time since at the Haymarket Theatre: her characters were chiefly in the lower classes of housewives, and for a most happy domestic easiness in such characters I think her unequalled by any of our London performers. All her actions and words appeared the result of immediate feeling, so that she was totally free from that kind of anticipation by which an ordinary performer, anxious to get through his part, is induced to prepare his looks and his attitudes for what is to come. I have as little personal knowledge of MISS GRANT as of every other actress; I thought this notice due to a rising performer who has a

claim upon my gratitude for the pleasure she has afforded me, and upon the managers of our theatres for the pleasure she would afford others.

MRS. JORDAN.

I HAVE placed this charming actress under the head of comedy, notwithstanding her occasional performance in tragedy and her peculiar excellence in the artless miseries of *Ophelia*. The declamatory parts, which she sometimes sustains in sentimental plays, require, as I have before observed, very little genius on account of their verbal monotony; and though considerable feeling is mingled with every thing MRS. JORDAN does, yet she increases this very monotony by a plaintive undulation of voice, an alternate rise and fall of emphasis, that seems conscious of her want of tragic powers and is labouring to impress upon us something very fine, like a person spouting forth a laborious quotation: she appears indeed on these occasions to be reading her part, and proceeds from line to line with a singing solemnity, like a parcel of milliners, during their work, taking their turn to read *Romeo and Juliet* or the *Victim of*

Sensibility. As to her excellent performance of *Ophelia*, a great distinction must be made between characters originally and essentially tragic, and those which become so by some external means that do not change their disposition; between characters in short which are tragic on account of what they have done or felt, and those which become so by what is done to them: in the former case a general solemnity and sorrow is necessary in the performer, in the latter the character may still preserve it's sprightliness in it's utmost tragedy as *Ophelia* does in her madness, so that the tragic effect of such a character does not consist in the performer's powers of tragedy but in the contrast which it's misfortunes make with it's behaviour: the darkness is rather in it's atmosphere than in itself. Nothing can be more natural or pathetic than the complacent tones and busy goodnature of MRS. JORDAN in the derangement of *Ophelia*; her little bewildered songs in particular, like all her songs indeed, pierce to our feelings with a most original simplicity; but as all her actions and speeches are lively and airy, though unseasonably so, she is nothing but the comic actress who has become tragic for the reasons above mentioned.

The immediate felicity of MRS. JORDAN'S style consists perhaps in that great excellence of

MR. BANNISTER, which I have called heartiness; but as the manner of this feeling is naturally softened in a female, it becomes a charming openness mingled with the most artless vivacity. In characters that require this expression, MRS. JORDAN seems to speak with all her soul; her voice, pregnant with melody, delights the ear with a peculiar and exquisite fulness and with an emphasis that appears the result of perfect conviction; yet this conviction is the effect of a sensibility willing to be convinced rather than of a judgment weighing it's reasons; her heart always precedes her speech, which follows with the readiest and happiest acquiescence.

This subjection of the manner to the feelings has rendered MRS. JORDAN in her younger days the most natural actress of childhood, of it's bursts of disposition, and it's fitful happiness; and as her fancy has not diminished, and her knowledge of human nature must have increased, with her years, it would render her the most natural actress still, were it not for the increase of her person. To be very fat and to look forty years old is certainly not the happiest combination for a girlish appearance, and MRS. JORDAN, with much good sense, seems to have almost laid aside her *Romps* and her *Little Pickles* for younger performers. So delightful however are the feelings and tones of nature,

that there is still no actress who pleases so much in the performance of frank and lively youth, in SHAKSPEARE's *Rosalind* for instance, and the broad sensibilities of the *Country Girl*. With this frankness too she unites a power of raillery, seldom found in a performer of her honest cast. MRS. JORDAN manages this raillery with inimitable delicacy; yet it does not carry with it an air of contempt, though such an air is one of the severest weapons of the ironical humourist; it is not delivered with an indifferent air, though such an appearance gives irony one of it's most excellent reliefs; nor does it assume an air of gay acquiescence in the proceedings of it's object, though the object may thus become doubly ridiculous in it's misconception and unconscious furtherance of the ridicule. These three kinds of ridicule, considered with regard to the speaker, form a contrast with his manner only, since we can always discover his real meaning and mind, and are not surprised at either; but raillery becomes much more effective in the mouth of frankness and simplicity from the contrast it presents with the usual goodnature of the speaker, and from the peculiar obnoxiousness of that object which can rouse so unexpected and unusual a reprover. MRS. JORDAN utters her more serious ridicule with the same simplicity and

strength of feeling that always pervade her seriousness when it does not amount to the tragic, and she gives it a very peculiar energy by pronouncing the latter parts of her sentences in a louder, a deeper, and more hurried tone, as if her goodnature should not be betrayed into too great a softness and yet as if it wished to get rid of feelings too harsh for her disposition. Her lighter raillery still carries with it the same feeling, and her laughter is the happiest and most natural on the stage; if she is to laugh in the middle of a speech, it does not separate itself so abruptly from her words as with most of our performers; she does not force herself into those yawning and side-aching peals, which are laboured on every trifling occasion, when the actor seems to be affecting joy with a tooth-ach upon him or to have worked himself into convulsions like a Pythian priestess; her laughter intermingles itself with her words, as fresh ideas afford her fresh merriment; she does not so much indulge as she seems unable to help it; it increases, it lessens with her fancy, and when you expect it no longer according to the usual habit of the stage, it sparkles forth at little intervals, as recollection revives it, like flame from half smothered embers. This is the laughter of the feelings; and it is this predominance of the heart in all she says and does

that renders her the most delightful actress in the *Donna Violante* of the *Wonder* and the *Clara* of *Matrimony*, and in twenty other characters, which ought to be more ladylike than she can make them, and which acquire a better gentility with others.

Why MRS. JORDAN should be so deficient in the lady will however be no matter of surprise to those who reflect, in the first place, on the levelling familiarities of her profession,* and, in the second, on the broad and romping characters in which she has hitherto excelled and to which the manners of any actress, perpetually employed in those characters, must in some degree unavoidably be bent. MRS. JORDAN has unfortunately been the finest *breeches-figure*, as the newspapers gloatingly call it, upon the British stage; her leg is reported to have been copied into a model for the statuary, and her foot has rivalled the sublime toes of that modest dancer VESTRIS, who differed with the all-conquering ACHILLES merely as it was the mortality of the warrior and the immortality of the dancer that lay in their respective heels, and who one day cried out to his son, "Here, boy, kiss this foot, which enchants heaven and earth!" This male attirement of actresses is one of the most barbarous, injurious and unnatural customs

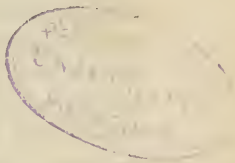
* See page 156.

of the stage; it has proceeded sometimes from want of invention in the author, sometimes from a spirit of pruriency, or, if they please, of versatility in the actresses; for when actors rule authors, as they do in our time, good performers may very often obtain what parts they please. In all cases it is injurious to the probability of the author and to the proper style of the actress, for if she succeeds in her study of male representation she will never entirely get rid of her manhood with it's attire; she is like the *Iphis* of OVID and changes her sex unalterably. There is required, in fact, a breadth of manners and demeanour in a woman's imitation of men, which no female, who had not got over a certain feminine reserve of limb, could ever maintain or endure; and when the imitation becomes frequent and the limbs bent to their purpose, it is impossible to return to that delicacy of behaviour, which exists merely as it is incapable of forgetting itself. Vivacity does nothing but strengthen the tendency to broadness by allowing a greater freedom of action; it merely helps the female to depart more from her former chaste coldness of character, from the simplicity of her former mental shape; it is like attempting to straiten a curled lock by holding it nearer the fire. I cannot but persuade myself, therefore, that MRS. JORDAN'S inability

to catch the elegant delicacy of the lady arises from her perpetual representation of the other sex and of the romping, unsettled, and uneducated part of her own. It has been the fashion to compare MISS DUNCAN in the character of a lady with MRS. JORDAN; but let them be compared with references to their age and situation. The deficiency of MRS. JORDAN arises from bad or inappropriate habits of acting: had she never represented rakes and romps, it is most probable she would have been at least as genteel as MISS DUNCAN, for in point of real genius and comic powers she is as much her superior as she has been in person and still is in voice. MISS DUNCAN has undoubtedly the advantage in gentility, and her youth and figure will assist that advantage: but let her take care of her superiority; she has lately been very fond of wearing the breeches, and she wears them, as SALLUST's female danced, much better than becomes her.

MRS. JORDAN, as a performer who unites great comic powers with much serious feeling, and who in all her moods seems to be entirely subservient to her heart, is not only the first actress of the day, but as it appears to me from the description we have of former actresses, the first that has adorned our stage. But if it may be suffered me to shadow with a little gloomy philosophy the

gaiety of theatric criticism, if it may be suffered me to fancy myself at some silent distance from the brilliant stage, undisturbed by it's noise and undazzled by it's lustre, how distressing is it to our benevolence, how humiliating to our powers of pleasing, and to our capacity of receiving pleasure, that the very tastes and abilities, that produce one of our most rational delights, should corrupt the source of that delight; that the stage should at once be the improver of our manner and the debaser of it's own; that the most sensitive, the most amiable part of the creation can scarcely ever venture upon the public imitation of even the most estimable part of their sex, without losing something of what renders themselves estimable!



MISS DUNCAN.

THE same reason that induced me to rank MRS. JORDAN as a comedian only, has confined MISS DUNCAN to the same class, though she also performs with success in tragedy. I have already described the distinction between characters in themselves tragic and those which are rather externally so, or between those which command our pity by a general and strong melancholy of feeling, and those which excite it by a sudden alteration of fortune or by any unforeseen and melancholy chance that affects their circumstance and situation rather than their disposition.* MISS DUNCAN has not so much feeling as MRS. JORDAN, who indeed is feeling itself personified, but she can exhibit much sensibility in scenes of apprehension and danger, and she displays both sensibility and judgment in the character of *Florence* in the *Curfew*, when she is sitting in the robbers' cave disguised as a captive

* See page 162.

boy: her attitude, when she listens at snatched intervals to the conference of the banditti, is perhaps of too eager and betraying a nature, but her downcast, harmless, and innocent repose of demeanour, when she finds herself observed, is just and happy, and her petitions to the robber who is commissioned to destroy her are full of agitation, at once despairing with all a girl's apprehension, and yet clinging to hope from the very sensation of fear. Her declamation is not so bad as MRS. JORDAN'S, for it is not so like a singing reader's; but it mistakes vehemence for dignity, and therefore is apt to degenerate into what is vulgarly but emphatically called *mouthing*.

The ability, which chiefly distinguishes MISS DUNCAN from other actresses, is in her representation of the fashionable lady, and in this she is certainly original and alone. From what I have heard however of MISS FARREN, and one or two other performers of earlier times, MISS DUNCAN does not seem to possess a very peculiar claim to gentility when compared with former actresses, but rather with respect to it's present rarity on the stage. But in characters that have lost something of feminine delicacy and therefore do not admit the highest polish of gentility, in the haughty *Juliana* of the *Honeymoon* and in that *Lady Teazle*, which seems so perpetual a stumb-

ling-block to MRS. JORDAN, the praise of individuality and most appropriate spirit must be allowed to MISS DUNCAN. *Lady Teazle* is a personage not overwhelmed with feeling, her gaieties and her sorrows obey rather her bodily sensibility, and as she rules her husband as well as intrigues, she has lost quite sufficient of female delicacy to demand a slight touch of the masculine: for such a character and more particularly for the haughty vivacity of *Juliana*, MISS DUNCAN is excellently qualified by a commanding figure, prominent features, a voice high enough to announce the female but too harsh in general, a powerful conception of raillery and of the sparkling bustle of high life, and a kind of personal flourish which in more retired characters renders her vivacity rather too theatric. It is observable, that in the latter part of her performance of *Juliana*, when her haughty spirit is subdued by the *Duke*, this tendency to flourish does not leave her with the spirit that required it, but in the soft answers, which she gives her husband, she appears more eager to make a fine speech than to feel what he has been telling her; and this theatricism becomes the more apparent from that complete abandonment to the feelings, to which ELLISTON, who performs the *Duke*, can give up all his countenance. Her songs partake of the same

flourish, though they are evidently superior to MRS. JORDAN'S in science, and in spite of her shrill voice occasionally produce even the pathetic. If the end however of this accomplishment be like that of the other arts, to reach the feelings, there is no occasional singer who arrives so soon at the heart as MRS. JORDAN. The heart indeed bounds forth to meet the effect of her song; from others it is contented to wait for it.

This perpetual flourish about MISS DUNCAN, while it renders her less natural in scenes void of art, assists her at certain times, when she drops her real character for some mimickry or effort of intrigue, and the same spirit that inspires this species of triumph enables her to assume any disguise that shall produce an eventual victory or superiority to herself. The general character indeed of her style of acting may be termed imposing; she seems both designed and inclined to shew herself to advantage, or to prove her superior advantage at last, in all she says and does. For this reason her two happiest characters, in my opinion, are *Maria* in the *Citizen* and *Miss Hardcastle* in *She Stoops to Conquer*, in both of which she can display her spirit of raillery and bustle, her powers of circumvention, and her enjoyment of ultimate victory. There is no actress any way equal to her in either of these parts.

Her personal appearance, which has more of elegance than of tenderness, her conquering manner, and her occasionally vixen looks, are completely in unison with the conquering, the talkative, the teazing *Maria*, who can certainly feel very little love for the man she is perpetually plaguing into melancholy, a vowing and protesting swain, whose tender sheepishness has something in it too much beneath his mistress's feet ever to meet such a heart as her's. This is a fault in the author, but it serves to elevate the vivacious actress. Her pretended foolishness, which so astonishes and alarms the credulous young citizen who was designed to marry her against her wishes, is sustained with a vacancy of talk and latterly with a distress of manner infinitely droll; and the contrast between the two performers becomes doubly spirited between the thick civic appearance of BANNISTER, who in personating the stupid *Young Philpot* is fancying himself so wise, and the elegant shape and superior spirit of MISS DUNCAN which are still perceived through her affected ideotcy. It is with the same animation she enters into the pretended employment of *Miss Hardcastle* as barmaid, and nothing can be a finer picture of female triumph than her dashing enumeration of those fashionable follies of which her lover had boasted to the bar-

maid, which barmaid he now discovers to be the very young lady before whom he had been so bashful; her air, her figure, her features, her voice, are all called into their proper action in this triumphant display. It is, in short, for this peculiar talent, as well as for that vixen countenance MISS DUNCAN can so alarmingly assume, and that sharp rapid voice which I do not mean to provoke when I call it *nagging*, that I am inclined to suppose her performance of *Nell* in the *Devil to Pay* superior to MRS. JORDAN'S; and I am very sorry to have lost the sight of this performance; that is, as sorry as bachelor can be to lose a specimen of wifish ferocity.

Whatever becomes too glaring by this characteristic flourish, whatever superfluity of broad manner there is in MISS DUNCAN, I cannot but in great measure deduce, as I have done in other actresses, from her performance of male characters.* The English are not yet surfeited, like the French or the Neapolitans, into an indifference for female shapes, because their women have not utterly divested themselves of clothing; they are therefore extremely fond of those stage exhibitions of necks and legs, which can conveniently supply the common deficiency of the sight, and at the same time leave the national character

* See page 166.

of their women uninjured. This passion is so well understood by foreigners, that an Italian woman, who sung in this country the other day, advertised in the Opera bills a new scene, purposely added to introduce her in male attire. But is it not infinitely degrading to an English woman, to a woman of that nation so famous for the delicacy and domestic importance of it's females, to stand in the gaze of a thousand eyes, divested of her becoming concealments, and imitating the appearance and actions of a sex, to whom she is always most lovely when most unlike? A slave in a West Indian market could scarcely undergo a more humiliating exhibition. There are many indeed among the audience who are entranced on such occasions, and these are principally old men, who gloat through their opera-glasses on a display so refreshing to their memories. What a charming homage to genius! How complimentary to the powers of the actress, to think of nothing but the cut of her ancle or the undulation of her hip!

It will be answered me by the admirers of this personal display, that it is very possible for a woman to be perfectly virtuous and to dress in men's cloaths. If perfect virtue with women consists in the mere preservation of what is called their honour, I will agree with them as to the

possibility; but I refer them to the biography of our most famous actresses. By the indifferent or the jovial it will be exclaimed, "Zounds, why what the deuce would you expect in an actress?" Why, I would expect them to have some regard for the profession they have adopted, some of that spirit which induces a very cobler, whatever may be his temper or disposition, to do nothing that shall disgrace his calling. It is notorious to every body, that the profession of the stage has been rendered disreputable by the manners and habits of it's members: but it is a profession which certainly requires a peculiar and discriminative knowledge, and wherever there is knowledge there ought to be good reputation. Every individual performer should lend the assistance of example to rescue it from contempt, if it be merely for the sake of his associates; for it is the misfortune of collective bodies, that it's degenerate members even if they do not degrade the minds, will inevitably destroy the reputation of the whole system.

Let the actress, who is fond of displaying her person in male attire, never forget, that the applause which she gains in such a dress cannot possibly carry with it any thing of *respect:* the more vehement it is, the more is it an acknowledgment of a very lamentable familiarity in the

performer, and of a very gross kind of gratitude on the part of the audience.

I have introduced these observations into the present article, not because I mean to apply the whole of their inferences and exemplifications to MISS DUNCAN, but because I have felt peculiarly interested in the future fame of the best *lady* our comic stage possesses, and have not a little lamented to see her increasing fondness for male attire. It will be objected perhaps, that an actress cannot help appearing in what the manager wishes; but even then to *appear*, and to provoke attention by an appearance full of display, are very different things: I have seen both MRS. HENRY SIDDONS, and MISS SMITH in male attire; but whenever I have seen them so dressed, they have always given as little as possible to the public eye: jackets, trowsers, and cloth pantaloons do not provoke so many opera-glasses as tight waistcoats that imprison the waist merely to give greater freedom to the chest, white silk stockings that make the leg want nothing but a pedestal to fix it for the eye of the connoisseur, and tight breeches through which MR. SHELDON might read a lecture on the sartorian muscles. Some of our actresses seem to jump into this kind of clothing with as much energy and enjoyment, as the Dutchman who for a wager leaped

into what are so unaptly termed his small-clothes and fastened them besides, in two seconds: it is only a pity, that the breeches are not of the same kind.

Miss Duncan is a very spirited and very promising actress, and she has what many actresses have not, a respectability to lose. It requires but a little exercise of her good sense to persuade her, that however respectable a reputation may be deserved by propriety of action in private life, the respectability of public characters depends almost entirely on their public manners, and that to strut about in all the insolence of a military coxcomb, to slap the jovial fellows on their backs, to rap out oaths with a twang, and to imitate drunken lobby-loungers is not the surest way to preserve either her own delicacy or the respect of others. She may become a very gay sort of something like a man, but she must forget herself first; and in proportion as she does this, she will forget something very ingenious and very pleasing.

SECTION III.—TRAGEDY AND COMEDY.

MR. ELLISTON.

If Briareus were to appear on earth with his hundred hands, the world would deny him his powers. There is something in a multiplicity or combination of powers, that excites the incredulity of mankind in spite of ocular demonstration. Wonder has been defined to be the effect of novelty upon ignorance, and as ignorance is but a shallow recipient, it is in this case perhaps filled above it's brim and lost in the torrent. In no instance is this hardness of belief so powerfully exhibited as at the union of tragic and comic excellence. The long disputes and jealousies arising from their combination in Garrick have scarcely ceased at this moment, and they were instantly roused at the appearance of Mr. Elliston, who is the only genius that has approached that great actor in

universality of imitation. When VOLTAIRE produced his first comedy, he concealed the author's name because he had succeeded in tragedy: his caution was afterwards proved to be well-founded: the instant he was discovered, the journalists unanimously altered their opinion, for though SHAKSPEARE had done it in England, DE VEGA in Spain, and RACINE in France, yet it was evidently impossible that a man could write tragedy and comedy too. The English are less pardonable when they indulge such an incredulity, since they have had so many excellent examples to persuade their belief. But after all perhaps, it is the critics only who would convince us of MR. ELLISTON's utter incapacity for tragic acting, those amiable journalists, who will abuse one performer merely to please another, who after getting drunk at an actor's table will come and tell us what power he possesses over their senses, and what a want of solidity there is in that man who never invites them to eat his roast beef. These gentlemen, some day or other, will endeavour to argue, that the world is divided into mere merrymakers and mourners, and that it is impossible for the same man to laugh and to cry.

Though I do not think ELLISTON so excellent in tragedy as in comedy, yet I would never be so

tasteless as to brush the dew entirely from his laurels and allow him nothing but his dry humour. He is already the second tragedian on the stage, and he wants nothing but study and a more heroic countenance to be at least equal to MR. KEMBLE, whom in the true inspiration of his art I think he excels. His person is elegant, but let us examine the deficiencies of his face, his peeping eyes, and his truly English nose, and it will be astonishing to consider what a dignity as well as general variety he can summon to his features, and how infinitely he is superior in general expression to MR. CHARLES KEMBLE and MR. HENRY JOHNSTON, actors blessed with faces of handsome tragedy.

If MR. ELLISTON'S want of the hero in countenance renders his aspect less imposing in grand characters than that of MR. KEMBLE, his want of study renders him considerably inferior to that careful actor in the graver and less active parts of tragedy. He cannot retire into himself with that complacent studiousness, which feels easy in the absence of bustle and in the solitary enjoyment of it's own powers: in soliloquy therefore, which is nothing but thinking loudly, he is too apt to declaim; and in this respect he is like those common actors, who think of nothing but their profession, and for-

get that declamation is of all styles of speaking the most unfit for soliloquies, because they ought never to have the air of being made for effect. For this reason, his *Hamlet*, which surpasses MR. KEMBLE's in humour, and on account of it's youth has the advantage also in appearance, is by no means so just a picture of the more philosophical parts of the prince's character, of his sorrow, his profound reflection, and that mingled air of anxiety and repose, which breathes over the manner of a person whose hours are spent in meditating one great purpose. The character of *Hamlet* however seems beyond the genius of the present stage, and I do not see that it's personification will be easily attained by future stages; for it's actor must unite the most contrary as well as the most assimilating powers of comedy and tragedy, and to unite these powers in their highest degree belongs to the highest genius only.* With all the real respect I have for a true actor, I must rank him in an inferior class both to the great painter and great musician; and neither of these inspired ones has united comic and tragic excellence. It is the pen alone, which has drawn a magic circle round the two powers,

* See page 41.

and rendered them equally obedient to the master's hand.

That MR. ELLISTON's tragic genius is naturally equal, if not superior, to that of MR. KEMBLE, may be seen in his quick conception of whatever is most poetical or in other words most fanciful in tragedy; and it must be recollected that the extravagant character of *Sir Edward Mortimer*, which darts through every extreme of imagination and feeling, was condemned in it's original representation by KEMBLE, and received with enthusiasm in it's vivification by ELLISTON. Both these performers have their extremes in madness, but as ELLISTON's is the violent one, it is less opposite to the frenzied fancy of *Mortimer*. MR. KEMBLE has too much method in his madness, and in his most fanciful speeches he cannot forget his usual precise nod of the head and preaching abstraction of delivery: he sometimes reminds one of the sick barber in the *Connoisseur*, who supplied his inability to procure medical advice, by putting doctors' wigs on four or five of his blocks and pretending to hold a dialogue with them round his bed: he seems to talk solely for himself, if not to himself, and occasionally exhibits an air of solemn satisfaction at his own speeches that becomes absolutely ludicrous. As to love, which is the

vital principle of another frenzied character performed by both these actors, that of *Octavian*, I have already expatiated upon MR. KEMBLE'S utter want of amatory feeling: his attempts this way may be compared to the ogling of HOGARTH'S parish clerk in the reading desk; for they present a most ludicrous mixture of the clumsy, the serious, and the uncharacteristic. He seems indeed to do every thing he possibly can to injure the natural effect both of his own love and the love of others, for it appears by a curious communication to the NEWS, that he has absolutely forbidden the actress, who performs his mistress, to express her affection a jot more naturally than he does his own.* The fault of ELLISTON in *Octavian* is certainly not want of ardour, either amorous or declamatory. If he bursts into his maddening mouthings with the proper vehemence, he sinks into recollective tenderness with as proper a softness; but like a man accustomed to yield to his feelings, he does both with a natural abandonment; though his sensations may be momentary, he is full of them for the time; his feelings follow each other like the buckets on a water-wheel, full one instant and empty the next, now rising with all their rapidity, now disappearing with as rapid a fall. In this quick

* See Appendix.

variety of conception, which requires as quick and various an expression, his management of features not naturally good is astonishing. Sorrows and joys, regret and indulged memory, despair and hope, love and hatred, the collectedness of reason and the scatter of insanity, rush over his features with alternate mastery: if there is any fault in his vehemence, it is the indulgence of that sobbing, in which he has been so injudiciously imitated,* and which injures the suddenness of his transitions from patience to despair. Sobs may occasionally attend a sudden feeling of grief, but they are never frequent except in a long indulgence of tears: in fact they are a violent effort of nature to regain it's strength after an exhaustion of weeping, as we may observe in children; and we have an excellent example of their proper imitation in hysterical ladies, who with much knowledge of cause and effect always keep their sobs for the last touch of the pathetic. But the smile of MR. ELLISTON is more natural and winning than any one actor's, and when it suddenly breaks from the midst of his melancholy, exhibits a feeling unknown to MR. KEMBLE's countenance, whose familiar expression is always accompanied with

* See Appendix.

an air of precise superiority. In most actors you can fancy from their familiar expression what their feeling in private life may be; you become acquainted with the men, as you do with a poet from his works; but MR. KEMBLE always appears the actor; you see nothing in his face of what you conceive to be domestic habits and feelings: he is almost a second mystery of the Man with the Iron Mask.

MR. ELLISTON's peculiar warmth of feeling has rendered him the best lover on the stage both in tragedy and comedy, and when we consider the theatric dominion of love, this single superiority gives an actor a greater range of characters than any one talent he could possess. MR. CHARLES KEMBLE indeed has so much amatory softness, that I once thought him superior to ELLISTON in the single character of *Romeo*; but he has suffered himself of late to be overcome by a most peculiar kind of indolent air, that seems too much occupied with it's own ease to possess that attention to another which is the soul of love. When ELLISTON makes love, he appears literally to live in the object before him; he shews a most original earnestness in his approach and in his devoirs to his mistress, he enters into all her ideas, he accompanies her speech with affectionate gestures of assent or anticipation, he dwells upon her face

while she is talking to another; in short, he is his fair one's shadow which obeys her slightest movement with simultaneous acknowledgment.—Love leads to pleasure, and I make a natural transition from MR. ELLISTON's tragic to his comic powers.

MR. ELLISTON's love is equally natural in all it's shapes, in the self-tormenting suspicions of SHERIDAN's *Falkland*, in the assumed gaiety and side chagrin of *Frederick* in *Matrimony*, and in the affectation of alternate submissiveness and tyranny, the pretended indifference, the dry raillery, and lastly the dignified affection of the *Duke Aranza*. His performance of the second character is in my opinion a perfect specimen of real love affecting indifference and at length yielding to it's object, and I am sorry that I did not expatiate in the proper place upon the nature of MRS. JORDAN also, in his wife *Clara*. The cool manner arising from their unexpected confinement to the same room after a voluntary separation, and the gradual approach of their hearts, divided as they had been by wayward circumstance rather than by loss of affection, are managed with a delicacy superior to any theatric picture of simplicity I ever saw. ELLISTON's airs of disdain, when his young wife with sidelong raillery commences a gay song, are full of natural petulance; he turns

the back of his chair towards her to read his book to himself, then crosses and re-crosses his legs, then listens with some sort of admiration at her voice though with the book up to his eyes, then darts them again with fitful impatience on the book, as he fancies himself observed; and lastly, as she draws nearer to him to play her lute in his ear, turns his chair more violently, jerks his head with a pshaw of malicious pity and irritation, and again fixes his eyes on the book as if he were thoroughly absorbed in the perusal, though his overstrained eagerness proves him unable to read a syllable. As this distance however is gradually narrowed, the mutual advances are made with the greatest delicacy and under the mask of that common indifference, which allows a familiarity without acknowledging a friendship. If the wife ventures in an indifferent tone of voice to express something like surprise and satisfaction at her husband's re-assumption of hair-powder, he receives the observation with an affirmative equally cool and with a most judicious hasty eking out of the speech, while he feels his head as if to assure himself of a thing so perfectly indifferent to him; the author however with much nature has made him so far moved as to compliment his wife with rather an earnest kind of civility on her new head-dress, and then MRS. JORDAN with

equal nature and agreeably to female susceptibility, exhibits a rather warmer acknowledgment of the compliment, till at length civility softens into complacency, and complacency melts into tenderness: the performers then very properly indulge in as much social eagerness, as they were before distant and slow, for capricious lovers are full of extremes. This is altogether the most complete scene of amorous quarrel that I have witnessed.

If MR. ELLISTON however is raised by his feeling to this amatory perfection, his observation of habits and manners enables him to assume with equal skill the more external love of the fashionable gallant, that love in fact which is a mere love of the world directed for the moment to a single purpose. Much is always said by old frequenters of the theatre, with a very plaintive kind of malice, respecting the inimitable performance of deceased actors, the absence of whom, however great their fame may be, is often lucky perhaps for their comparison with the present stage. You may be amused for a whole evening not merely with the vivacity of ELLISTON in *Archer* and *Sir Harry Wildair*,* but with his variety of countenance, his complete occupation with busy pleasure, and the dry humour so peculiarly his own, and then an

* See Appendix.

old gentleman sitting next you, with two flaps to his waistcoat, shall tell you that DODD or GARRICK was the only man who could *do* that sort of character; that PEG WOFFINGTON, the finest breeches figure that ever was seen, played *Sir Harry* much more *correct;* and then, offering you his snuff-box to secure your attention, he exclaims with a sigh, "The last time I saw GARRICK—let me see—ay—was it or was it not in *Don John?* yes it must have been *Don John*, because he wore slashed breeches,—ay—in *Don John*—and a very noble performance it was—I watched the eyes of the women, Sir, all the time he was playing, and egad, they followed him about as if they were jealous." Here the old gentleman looks round to the side boxes, and shakes his head with a sort of triumphant pity: "Hah! the boxes are very different things from what they were in those times—some pretty women to be sure—but no wits, Sir, nobody one knows or reads about—now there was DOCTOR JOHNSON used to be in the boxes when GARRICK played—a very great man—I recollect seeing him when GARRICK did *Lear*—he was fast asleep all the last act, and I couldn't keep my eyes off of him—He was a very great man to be sure—I recollect offering him a pinch of snuff once—allow me, Sir,—the true Macubaw, I assure you—Pray, Sir, is'nt it your opinion that this theatre has a certain vile

hugeness, as a man may say, in it's appearance? —I often tell Jack Wilkins—'Ah, Jack,' says I, "it's a long time since you and—" At this instant the stage-bell luckily rings and saves you from a long history of Mr. John Wilkins and the old gentleman's club, who were all rampant apprentices and critics in their day, and as fond of hissing the actors as they are of applauding their memory. You just snatch an instant to say that you cannot see how the size of the theatre can hurt it's appearance however inconvenient it may be for the audience, and then busy yourself so entirely with the new scene, that your ancient critic is compelled to let you alone, with an ardent desire however that he had you over a pint of wine, to convince you of the hopelessness of the present stage.

But social and vivacious as ELLISTON is in all his gallant characters, there is always something in his manner of that peculiar self-command of action, which is half the secret of gentility. If this restraint renders him second to LEWIS, as I have already observed, in characters of pure heartiness, it gives him an unequalled grace in the polished gentleman. Blessed with the proper medium between the extreme vivacity of that restless actor and the extreme languor and reserve of MR. CHARLES KEMBLE, he ap-

propriates almost exclusively to himself the hero of genteel comedy, that character which attracts the regard of the fair and the fashionable, and that in it's happiest point of view, unites the most natural attractives of social pleasure with the nicest repellents of gross familiarity. If he is not the "scholar's eye" like MR. KEMBLE, he is the "courtier's and soldier's tongue and sword,"

> The glass of fashion and the mould of form;

and to finish his talents for the gentleman, he exhibits a fund of miscellaneous powers, which enables him to be at his ease in all companies and in all exhibitions of polite acquirement. He is the gentleman of SIR WILLIAM JONES, who reckoned every little art, that added to mental or bodily grace, an object of ambition to polished leisure. If dancing is going on, he joins in the step; if fencing, he leaps into his posture: if singing, he takes his part in the harmony. The effect of this spirit is particularly distinguishable at those times, when the actor mingles more familiarly with his audience and talks to them in his own person: thus there is no performer, who gives a prologue such social elegance, or addresses the house upon managerial topics with so neat and natural a strength.

His gayer versatility however is not strictly confined to the varieties of genteel comedy; he can descend with very excellent mimickry below his sphere, as in his disguises of a Jew and a common soldier in *Love Laughs at Locksmiths*, and in many other low characters which his pride or his policy has laid aside, since his possession of the theatric throne at Drury-lane. It must be confessed at the same time that he descends with some of his radiance about him, for he certainly does not so entirely get rid of the gentleman, as he should. He is not in this respect like GARRICK, of whom a wild story is related respecting a young lady that fell in love with him while he was performing *Ranger*, and who was very judiciously taken by her parents, a few nights afterwards, to see him in the part of *Abel Drugger*, which he acted with so natural a grossness as turned the lady's love almost to antipathy. MR. ELLISTON's gentlemanly pertinacity however is of use to him in one disguise, which GARRICK's consummate versatility seems to have led him at once to perfect and to abuse: I believe it was DR. JOHNSON, who accused him of assuming the livery with too accurate a vulgarity in the character of *Archer* in the *Beaux' Stratagem*.

The performance which allows the greatest versatility to ELLISTON, while it leaves him his

proper gentility, is that of the three brothers in the *Three and the Deuce.* In order to explain his acting in this singular drama, it is necessary to explain the author a little. The story turns upon the adventures of three brothers of the name of *Single*, who are of very different manners and dispositions, but so perfectly alike in appearance, that none but their most intimate relations can distinguish them separately. One of them is a serious gentleman, another a lively beau, and the third an idiot, a most improper object certainly for any kind of drama.* Mr. Elliston represents this triple likeness with a felicity, which it is little praise to say no other actor could approach. The serious *Mr. Single* has a servant,† who resides with his master at the same hotel, of which the other brothers, without the slightest suspicion of family neighbourhood, happen to be inmates. Upon this poor fellow turns the attraction of the piece. He is joked and beaten about by the merry brother, who does not know what to make of his misplaced attention; the grave brother, who is equally at a loss to understand his remonstrances and accusations of levity, treats him as a drunkard; and the idiot gives the climax to his astonishment by

* See Appendix. † See page 102.

manifesting a total ignorance of his office and person. Into these three different characters and their aspects, with the assistance of three kinds of hats and as many modes of buttoning his coat, MR. ELLISTON changes himself with an alternation as perfect as it is rapid: in the gay brother, with his cocked hat and huge frill, he dances, and sings, and fences, and plagues the strange footman, and darts about into a thousand ideas and attitudes: in a moment you find him with the gravest of all possible faces reproaching his servant for his fancies, and deliberately convincing himself of the man's intoxication: in an instant he waddles forward under a white beaver, with a wide grin upon his countenance and with a stupid lisp that breaks every now and then into as stupid a giggle. One does not know which to admire most, his bustling importance in the first character, his real importance in the second, or his silly earnestness and gaping pretensions to importance in the third. When he boasts of his riches to the Welsh maid-servant, with an idiotic undulation of whine, he reminds you of the half-breathing pomposity of a little girl whispering about her new shoes.

In this triple character MR. ELLISTON exhibits with it's usual effect that dry expression of humour, which is so peculiarly adapted to his genius and countenance, and which is in fact his

great originality. All art acquires it's greatest effect from contrast, and particularly the art of humourous ridicule, which in a grave dress pursues an end to which it's means are apparently inadequate. It is full of contrast: it's manner is easiest when it's intention is most violent; it appears to be absolutely indifferent when it is absorbed in attention; it says one thing when it evidently means another; and it's meaning, instead of being dissipated, is peculiarly embodied and enforced by this confusion. It might appear, at first, like attempting to reach a goal by running away from it, or endeavouring to grasp a sword by putting your hands in your waistcoat pockets; but in an instant the goal is reached, the active sword is grasped.

The end of an actor, in the management of this humour, is to talk in two languages; one, the language of the tongue; and the other, that of the manner and aspect united. CHARLES KEMBLE sometimes exhibits much nature in the lighter intermixture of these opposite effects: he assents, for instance, to a ridiculous proposition with a very easy gravity that contradicts it's necessity by it's indifference: but he cannot reach the perfect conviction of ELLISTON, who with half-shut eyes, an opened mouth, a shake of the head, and a nasal depth of affirmation, perfectly cheats his

interlocutor without deceiving the audience a jot. His representation of *Captain Beldare*, in *Love Laughs at Locksmiths*, affords an excellent specimen of his skill in dry humour; but in no character does he display it with such felicity as in that of the *Duke Aranza* in the *Honey Moon*. As this character at the same time allows him also his lively gentility, his imposing dignity, and his amatory fire, it is altogether his finest performance. No actor, except MR. KEMBLE, can elevate himself to so marked as well as natural a height from the rest of the dramatic persons, or in other words can exhibit with such strong propriety that distinct character which the author intends for his hero. The *Duke Aranza* of the poet is the prominent point upon which every thing in the play turns and is beheld: the *Duke Aranza* of ELLISTON possesses the same relief, is the same central point, gives every thing the same prominence and distinction; but all is natural. When he courts his mistress, it is with the gallant obeisance of the prince; when he commands his wife, it is with the firmness of one who knows his duty and his right; when he joins in the rustic dance, it is with that familiarity of the gentleman, which in it's utmost condescension avoids the air of condescending; when he ironizes his peevish wife, or pleads sarcastically before his own servant, he

does it with a dignified conviction and seriousness that awes the lady while it enrages her. Every body, who has seen the *Honey Moon*, must recollect his consummate union of dignity, satire, and good humour, when he convinces the mock-duke, before whom his wife had brought him, how easily she might have perceived the difference

"Between your grace and such a man as I am."

In short, I have no hesitation in pronouncing his representation of this character a perfect performance; and there are but two other performances of note in my recollection which I consider as deserving the same epithet, MR. KEMBLE'S *Penruddock* and the *Queen Katharine* of MRS. SIDDONS.

With all this variety of conception and of representation, it is remarkable that MR. ELLISTON'S greatest fault is an occasional monotony, which indulges in a pompous depth of voice and a singular snatching of the breath at the end of his more energetic words. These snatches sometimes amount to a sort of grave sobbing, ludicrously abstracted from every thing like sorrow. His words seem to burst out with majestic emotion, and then to retire into themselves to enjoy their achievement. From whatever cause this error may arise, whether it really proceeds from the

self-complacency of declamation, or whether it be not rather a recollection of the speech-making schoolboy who affects a certain manly depth of utterance to astonish the lower forms, it is a mere habit of speaking which MR. ELLISTON ought to renounce with the greater ease, since it is owing neither to confined powers of voice nor to a confined range of ideas.

In spite of this fault however, I consider MR. ELLISTON, not only with respect to his versatility, but in his general excellence and in the perfection to which he has brought some of his characters, the greatest actor of the present day.

MR. KEMBLE's friends, MR. COOKE's, and MR. POPE's, all speaking at once.

"Bless my soul, sir, you have totally forgotten

that great actor MR. KEMBLE!"

that excellent, unsophisticated actor, MR. COOKE!"

that lofty, energetic, and surprising actor, MR. POPE!"

Excuse me, gentlemen. MR. KEMBLE is certainly an actor of consummate study; MR. COOKE has a genius natural and powerful, though confined; and MR. POPE is an excellent mimia-

ture painter. Let every body possess his due honours. It is my firm conviction, that if ELLISTON possessed the fine countenance of MR. KEMBLE, he would instantly outshine him in every body's opinion, even in the character which MR. KEMBLE at present calls his own. MR. KEMBLE's studiousness damps his enthusiasm; MR. ELLISTON's enthusiasm overcomes his study: if the one has more judgment, the other has more genius. MR. COOKE, like ELLISTON, is a greater comedian than tragedian; and in his peculiar walk undoubtedly displays a firm and original step; but neither in comedy nor tragedy is he at the height of the drama, for he is confined to hypocrisy and sarcasm. As to MR. POPE, he is, as I have said before, a very excellent artist: MR. ELLISTON, at least as far as I know, is no artist at all. They are therefore at issue: there are no points of comparison between them.

With respect to MR. ELLISTON's versatility, it is much the fashion for certain critics to insist, that if he performs twelve distinct species of character tolerably, he does not succeed in any one of them, so well as the actor of that particular character; he is great, they say, in the aggregate only: if his bundle in short is strong, his sticks are easily broken one by one. Now though his comedy is in my opinion generally unrivalled, yet I have granted that he is not so great in tragedy as

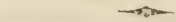
MR. KEMBLE, merely for want of manner, not for want of genius. But if these gentlemen desire perfection with versatility, let them observe that MR. KEMBLE wants versatility and perfection. MR. KEMBLE is by no means at the height of tragedy, since his best performance is *Penruddock*, which is of that mongrel declamatory genius, that belongs half to tragedy and half to comedy. If this actor be suffered to want perfection, who has to attain it in one or two species of character only, MR. ELLISTON may certainly be suffered in a greater degree, who has to attain it in many. If it be allowed a man not to reach the goal, who runs in one strait road, it may certainly be allowed another, who runs through *fifty* devious paths.

The powers of versatility unluckily weaken each other's effect, and were a performer able to represent ten characters to perfection, he would run the hazard of being thought inferior to ten other actors, each of whom was perfect in only one of them. A lady in four gauze cloaks of the brightest colour with a yellow one underneath might not boast half the amber radiance of a female dressed in nothing but the same yellow, but her colours would be really as bright and at the same time of a much richer variety. There are many of these unitarian critics, who think MILTON a more sublime poet than SHAKSPEARE, merely because his fancy is generally

grave and employed upon sublime subjects, not to mention that he is totally void of humour. SHAKSPEARE, unfortunately for himself, cannot only elevate our imagination, but can familiarize us with the business of life, nay whatis still more unlucky, he can make us laugh heartily, and has an inexhaustible fund of gay wit and humour. But it would be difficult to produce a sublime thought in MILTON which should not be at least equalled by one as sublime in the great dramatist: and unhappily for these gentlemen, MILTON is almost utterly deficient in one great part of the sublime, which is carried to it's perfection by SHAKSPEARE: it might be questioned, whether he ever excited a tear.

In short, if MR. ELLISTON performed in tragedy only, he would be thought a much better tragedian, not only because the critics would more willingly allow him his single claim, but because his comic powers would no longer present their superior contrast. It must be confessed at the same time, that he acts too often: his busy frequency of appearance injures him doubly; it familiarizes his powers of pleasing too much with the town, and it leaves him too little leisure for study. They whose value partakes much of the personal, whether kings or actors, should yield themselves as sparingly as possible to public exhibition. MR. KEMBLE knows this well.

MRS. HENRY SIDDONS.



This interesting actress is like those amiable domestic women, whose characters are soon described, because their duties are at once confined, simple, and performed with simplicity. She is one of those performers, who turn criticism into mere feeling, and of whose unobtrusive beauties twenty writers would say the same thing without being critics at all. It is an amiable solecism in our nature, that to admire what courts our admiration is absolutely a labour, while to search for beauties and to be pleased with them, even when they seem unwilling to be admired, is one of the most complacent of enjoyments.

Mrs. H. Siddons is neither a great tragedian nor a great comedian, and she attempts to be neither. Her genius is entirely feminine, for actresses like queens, lose something of the woman, in proportion as they exhibit the powers of command and the more vigorous acquirements. As-

assinations and bloodshed are as little conducive to female delicacy of effect on the stage, as they were in real life with CHRISTINA of Sweden or CATHARINE of Russia.

Love, sprightly in comedy, profound in tragedy, and delicate in every thing, is the peculiar talent of MRS. H. SIDDONS: if it is not so playful as that of MRS. JORDAN, it is much more refined: it is as female affection always should be, not a love for elegant rakes, not the love of man in the shape of goodness, but the love of goodness in the shape of man. It is for this reason she performs *Emily* in the *School for Friends* with such amiable feeling: it is a character perfectly adapted to her, because it is remarkable for that modesty which always accompanies great sensibility. When she checks the vivacity of *Lord Belmour*, who had attributed her frank simplicity to a declaration of love, when she resumes that reserve which she had never forgotten in her personal, however she might in her mental, feelings, when that very modesty, which is always humble, assists her elevation of manner, and that very love which she feels for the man before her prompts her to do away an impression that might render him more bold, every coquette in the boxes must blush for her own little arts, for the indulgences never meant to indulge, the distances never meant to withhold,

the sigh that says every thing and the heart that says nothing.

If it is not a great tragedian however, it is one of no mean powers, who can command our tears for *Juliet*. Wherever there is imagination, there is a poetical spirit, and wherever there is this spirit, there is a decided opposition to commonplace. No actress can represent this character like MRS. H. SIDDONS. If you wish to see a love too tender to be excited into vehement action, you discover all it's pathos in the meek idolatry of her *Juliet*'s face, in the calm decision of grief to which she gives up her widowed heart, in the still shudder, not the wildness, of fear with which she pictures to her recollection her loathsome companions in the tomb. Her affection has been too much subdued by it's own natural softness, by the perfection of feminine feeling, to start on a sudden into tragic strength; and it is for this reason her *Juliet* is upon the whole preferable to her *Belvidera*. There is a vigour about the glowing Venetian, an instant obedience to impulse, and I had almost said a prurient vehemence, which OTWAY was always too apt to mingle with his idea of youth: in an Italian female perhaps it is more natural than an actress with English feelings could represent; but though MRS. H. SIDDONS certainly excels in the tenderer scenes of *Belvidera*, she is

surpassed, I think, by MISS SMITH in those of more violence, in the momentary provocations to reproach, the wild disdain, and the wilder insanity. She has not strength of person, of feature, or of voice sufficient for even external vehemence.

And here the satirical touches of *Belvidera* remind me of the complete failure of MRS. H. SIDDONS in every thing approaching to satire. When I witnessed her raillery of the profligate dowager in the *School for Friends*, it was full of dramatic affectation: it looked satirically and spoke gaily, and it should have done the direct contrary. It was an inconsistency indeed in MISS CHAMBERS to put a strong piece of raillery in the mouth of so delicate and pure a character as *Emily*, and the actress would merely have given a worse effect to the mistake by acting better. Thus the faults of actors sometimes conceal the faults of authors. It is as if a lady were to slip down in attempting to kick her lap-dog: the thing is better because it is done badly, and the lady saves her character unintentionally.

The most general fault however in the style of this actress is a monotonous delivery. The tones indeed are the sweetest in the world, but we should become tired of APOLLO'S lyre, were it always in one key. It is lucky however that she is almost

totally occupied with amatory character; for we question whether in a lover's speeches monotony is not even proper. There is a monotony in the feelings of love, or rather there is an utter devotion to one object and meditation on one subject, which may produce a kind of unity in the tones of the voice. Children learning to read are always monotonous, because their attention is occupied with the single task before them: we must feel the varieties of our subject before we give variety to our reading. Again, if the various images presented to our mind in a book tend to some single impression or concentrate in one great idea, they produce another unity of sensation, and it is this sensation perhaps which causes the general monotony observable in church-reading. There is certainly more of reverential devotion in the monotony of our clergy, however it may be disgraced by those who do it from mere bad habit, than in the vivacious worship of the French preachers or the theatric restlessness of the Italian; and what is this devotion but an abstracted meditation upon one great idea?—I beg pardon for this transition from the theatre to the church; but if MASSILLON made use of RACINE in the pulpit, the good bishop can have no objection to be quoted in the theatre.

A modest female however is beneath no dignity

of allusion or of language; and, after admiring all the sweetness and the feeling of MRS. H. SIDDONS, I find nothing so delightful as the chastity of her demeanour. One would think, that a sensible actress would cultivate this modesty if it were merely for it's theatric rarity. When MRS. JORDAN plays *Rosalind*, you are amused with her archness, her vivacity, her carelessness, and you admire the shape of her leg: the *Rosalind* of MRS. H. SIDDONS interests you with a chastened feeling, you love the very aukwardness with which she wears her male attire, and you are even better pleased with her shape because you are left to fancy it. If the sight is more accurate in likenesses, fancy is a better painter of things to be liked. When the generality of actresses are representing the objects of a man's attachment, their broadness of demeanour produces in the beholders a kind of silent disagreement with the hero's choice, that deranges their satisfaction: his compliments become false, his ardour unwarrantable, his sorrows ridiculous; a delicate spectator cannot say "Such is the woman I would marry myself." But a modest actress, like MRS. H. SIDDONS, reconciles this inconsistency: love resumes it's respectability, and with it's respectability the acquiescence of the audience.

I beseech this interesting actress to despise that occasional deference of ogle, that languishing lift of the eye, which is her only affectation. It is tolerable in those actresses only who are merely pretty, and two or three of whom place all the effect of their style in this "eye-service as men-pleasers." These ladies use their eye-balls like tennis balls; they cast them to the ground merely to give them a more powerful ascent; they throw them about too from place to place, and their lovers are nothing but the objects of aim. All this is very frivolous and insipid: it is as much as saying to the audience "I have certainly fine eyes." But MRS. H. SIDDONS is not yet in the extreme, and she will easily be sensible, that it is not the look that creates soul, but soul that inspires the look. Let her feel as she always does, and leave her eyes to themselves; they will answer with eloquence when their speech is not dictated to them. The soul's painting, like material objects, must be copied into the vision with instantaneous unaided magic.

MISS SMITH.

AMONG the arts and mysteries of this great city, the mystery of theatric management is not the least wonderful. Our curiosity is naturally excited by those manifest inconsistencies in stage ordinance, which have existed ever since individual caprice or interest ruled the mimic world. Not that I have any ambition to explore all the strange variety of things in the wardrobe or the property-room, though an adventurous person might write an amusing history of his travels through the wooden Tartarus behind the scenes, as *how* he tumbled over a fork of lightning, broke his shins on a cloud, or hurt his knuckles against the main ocean—how at one moment he thrust his head into a dragon's mouth, and at the second found himself kicking against the sun—how he made a snow-storm serve him for writing-paper, found a law-deed in a lion's jaw, carved his name on a cataract, or played at nine-pins with a clap

of thunder—how the men and women in that strange land, after dying of a broken heart or killing themselves in the street, would go home and eat a hearty supper, not to mention how a beautiful goddess who had just descended from heaven would retire to drink a glass of porter, or how a virgin just dead and buried would ride off with her husband in a hackney coach. But without jesting, it would be very satisfactory to detect those interests and partialities, which advance the most insipid actresses to the most impassioned characters, and keep such a performer as MISS SMITH almost entirely from the public.

The little that is seen of this lady is just sufficient to display her superior powers, and to make us regret the long interval in her appearance. She seems to me to possess a strong and singular originality, a genius for the two extremes of histrionic talent, lofty tragedy and low comedy. The intermediate departments of acting she does not manage with any superiority: MISS DUNCAN has more elegant comedy, MRS. H. SIDDONS more of the tenderer feelings. To the character of *Lady Townley*, which is already too tragic, MISS SMITH gives a loftiness and a solemnity of demeanour that separates it entirely from comedy, and when she cannot help attempting an elegant liveliness, as in *Rosalind*, she perpetually

contradicts her vivacity by a strange uneasiness of manner, a want of self-possession, that would be very amiable if it proceeded entirely from her performance in male attire. Her deficiency in this respect is in some measure owing perhaps to her unskilfulness in those amatory feelings, which are generally intermixed with the vivacity of a comedy-heroine. But there is a peculiar something in her style, perhaps a natural reserve, which breathes round her a coldness unapproachable by love, and there always appears to me, in her very youth, a kind of premature matronliness that however it may increase our respect certainly lessens our feeling.

There are two characters, which are sufficient of themselves to persuade me of MISS SMITH'S genius for tragedy and farce, those of *Belvidera* in *Venice Preserved* and *Estifania* in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. *Belvidera* indeed would not be a character for MISS SMITH, did it express it's love like most heroines; but OTWAY, as I have before observed, has raised the spirited Venetian above the usual weak manner of her sex by a violence of passion that would render her masculine, did it arise from any thing but love. When *Belvidera* is merely tender, MISS SMITH makes us feel nothing but the want of MRS. H. SIDDONS; but when she complains of the midnight

ruffian, when she reproves her husband with a gloomy raillery for committing her to the care of abandoned conspirators, when she loses her senses, and all her native violence of character rushes forth in madness, she becomes the powerful tragedian, full of impassioned dignity, full of the thousand feelings of an afflicted fancy. Nothing is so sure a trial of an actor's genius as the representation of insanity. If one or two expressions of countenance will sometimes serve a tragedian for a whole evening, here are fifty demanded in a moment. They must chase each other over the face with as rapid and as distinct a reflection as wild birds over the waves.

A degree of violence in short is as necessary to MISS SMITH'S style, as restlessness is to that of LEWIS, or rough feeling to that of DOWTON; and it is this violence, rendered humourous by it's familiarity, which in her performance of *Estifania* induced me to think her qualified for low comedy. *Estifania* is a coarse character, a demirep whose object is money and who bears success or disappointment with the same want of softness. She has not therefore much of the feminine about her, but she possesses a quick insight into character and a bitter spirit of raillery. These two qualities MISS SMITH manages inimitably. Her eloquent features and large eyes, so dignified in tragedy,

become the announcers of a malicious satirist; and *Estifania* appears, like SALLUST or CHURCHILL, to detect others with the more skill because she knows their vices by experience. Not COOKE himself could abuse his enemy with more contemptuous sarcasm than MISS SMITH rails at the *Copper Captain* for cheating her. It is from her excellence in these extremes of character that she appears to me not only the second tragic actress on the stage, but if she would descend to scolding farce, inferior neither to MRS. JORDAN nor to MISS DUNCAN in comic vehemence.

MR. COOKE.

Mr. Cooke is the Machiavel of the modern stage. One would imagine, that if he had been in the French theatre during the revolution, when actors became legislators, he might have become the most finished statesman of his day. He can be either a gloomy hypocrite, like Cromwell, or a gay one, such as Chesterfield would have made his own son. He can render all his passions subservient to one passion and one purpose, and can

—— smile, and smile, and be a villain.

Like most statesmen however, he can do nothing without artifice. His looks and his tones invariably turn him from the very appearance of virtue. If he wishes to be seriously sentimental, he deviates into irony; if he endeavours to appear candid, his manner is so strange and inconsistent, that you

are merely inclined to guard against him the more. It is for these reasons, that his gentlemen in sentimental comedy become so aukward and inefficient, that his *Jaques* in *As You Like It*, instead of being a moralizing enthusiast, is merely a grave scoffer, and that his *Macbeth*, who ought to be at least a majestic villain, exhibits nothing but a desperate craftiness. Of his *Hamlet* one would willingly spare the recollection. The most accomplished character on the stage is converted into an unpolished, obstinate, sarcastic madman.

MR. COOKE is in fact master of every species of hypocrisy; and if he is a confined actor, it must be confessed, that his powers are always active and vigorous in their confinement. He is great in the hypocrisy that endeavours to conceal itself by seriousness, as in *Iago* and *Stukely*, in the hypocrisy that endeavours to conceal itself by gaiety and sarcasm, as in *Sir Archy M'Sarcasm*, and lastly in the most impudent hypocrisy, such as that of *Sir Pertinax M'Sycophant* and of *Richard the Third*. I do not think he can be called a great tragedian, though he performs *Richard* so excellently. Much of this character is occupied by the display of a confident dissimulation, which is something very different from the dignity of tragedy. If COOKE performs the more serious part with success, if we are attentive to his

misfortunes as well as to his prosperity, it is because our attention has been so fixed by the fraud that produced them: we see the punishment of hypocritical ambition fallen upon it's proper object. KEMBLE has more dignity in the character, but he entirely wants it's artifice, and he has done singular honour to his judgment and forbearance in relinquishing the crafty usurper to the most crafty of actors.

In the more humourous parts however of MR. COOKE's *Richard*, and indeed in all his hypocritical humour except when it soliloquizes or confesses itself, it may be questioned whether he ought to betray his deception to the audience by so manifest an hypocrisy of countenance. It is evident, that a consummate hypocrite in real life would attempt a look the very reverse of apparent fraud, otherwise he would render himself liable to detection, and in fact be no true hypocrite. To those who would object, that if hypocrisy be thus divested of externals, an actor capable of mere gravity would succeed best in deception, it may be answered, that there are always times in a play, when a hypocrite must talk to himself either by side-speeches or by expressive meditation; in soliloquies especially, he will lay aside the mask, and give a loose to his enjoyment or vexation by setting his features at liberty. The best excuse

however that can be given for the carelessness with which MR. COOKE's hypocrisy looks out of his countenance, is the unconscious enjoyment which deceitful villany cannot help expressing at the anticipation or attainment of success; and it must be confessed that any vice long indulged generally stamps it's peculiar character on the countenance.

A performer like COOKE is necessarily greater in comedy than tragedy, because hypocrisy is not only one of those baser passions which excite our contempt, but because it deals much in equivocation and sarcasm, which are among the first beauties of comedy. *Stukely* in the *Gamester* is tragic in the effects produced by his villany, but in the pursuit of this villany he is merely grave or sentimental; and every thing like cheating has a principle of the ridiculous in it: ROCHEFOUCAULT perhaps would account for this in the superiority which we give our own sagacity over the person cheated. With all COOKE's assumed meekness of countenance in this character and in that of *Iago*, with his fits of thoughtfulness so inimitably familiar, and his sudden sighs of pitying conviction, he is always greater as he approaches comedy, and his most finished performance is, in my opinion, *Sir Pertinax M'Sycophant* in the *Man of the World*. The author's *Sir Archy M'Sarcasm*

is merely a slight outline of this corrupt satirical Scotchman; and therefore it is nothing but a smaller sketch in the hands of the actor.

Sir Pertinax would be a perfect piece of acting, if MR. COOKE's action was more various. By giving the person represented a manner, it is sometimes indeed more impressive in it's effect, especially when the character is an eccentric one; but our love of genius will sometimes make us displeased with a beauty itself when we know the performer cannot help it, though MR. KEMBLE's *Penruddock* may be a proof to the contrary; and in the case of *Sir Pertinax* a variety of action would be much more natural, since he is of so various and sanguine a temper, so various in his contrivances, and so various in his behaviour. A monotony of any kind must be unusual with active hypocrisy.

But you may see all the beauties and all the faults of COOKE in this single character; and this proves perhaps that it is his favourite one, since he feels inclined to indulge all his habits in it's representation. The Scotch dialect which he so inimitably assumes is in vain undervalued by those, who persuade themselves that he was born in Scotland. In the first place, to be merely born there is nothing to the purpose, for a man born upon the sea might as well be expected to talk

like a dolphin. If he was educated by or with Scotch people, it is merely wonderful that he does not talk Scotch in his English characters, for he gives them none of those compressed vowels and liquified consonants, none of that artlessness and undulation of tone so ludicrous in *Sir Pertinax*. It is this artlessness of tone that renders a hypocritical Scotchman or Welchman more humourous on the stage than any other hypocrite, and more successful perhaps in the world. *Sir Pertinax* however conceals an unavoidable ludicrousness, which might sometimes injure his cause, by apparently delighting in his dialect and by possessing much intentional humour. If COOKE bows, it is with a face that says "What a fool you are to be deceived with this fawning!" If he looks friendly, it is with a smile that says "I will make use of you, and you may go to the devil." A simple rustic might feel all his affections warmed at his countenance, and exclaim "What a pure-hearted old gentleman!" but a fine observer would descry under the glowing exterior nothing but professions without meaning, and a heart without warmth.

The sarcasm of COOKE is at all times most bitter, but in this character it's acerbity is tempered with no respect either for it's object or for himself. His tone is outrageously smooth and

deep; and when it finds it's softest level, it's under monotony is so full of what is called hugging one's self, and is accompanied with such a dragged smile and viciousness of leer, that he seems as if he had lost his voice through the mere enjoyment of malice.

It is thus that in characters of the most apparent labour as well as in a total neglect of study, this excellent actor surpasses all his contemporaries. His principal faults are confined to his person, for they consist in a monotonous gesture and a very aukward gait. His shrinking rise of the shoulders however may give an idea of that contracted watchfulness, with which a mean hypocrite retires into himself. His general air indeed, his sarcastic cast of countenance with it's close wideness of smile and it's hooked nose, and his utter want of study joined to the villanous characters he represents, are occasionally sufficient to make some people almost fall out with the actor; but it must be recollected that if GARRICK was disgustingly vulgar in *Abel Drugger*, he displayed the most fascinating manners in private life, and that if MR. DAVENPORT the actor always looks like a man whose gouty leg has been just kicked, he is said to be a man of much benevolence.

MR. CHARLES KEMBLE.

I DO not know what thoughtlessness or forgetfulness could have possessed me, when I proposed to class this elegant actor with the tragedians only. I must have been seized with a little of that languor, which is his worst affectation, and which is as infectious in an actor as in a supper of lettuces. But how could I forget his occasional vivacity, his occasional dry humour, and his inimitable pictures of intoxication, so natural and yet never disgusting; not to mention his frequent awfulness of frown, which is infinitely droll, though he does not know it?

MR. CHARLES KEMBLE excels in three classes of character; in the tender lover like *Romeo*, in the spirited gentleman of tragedy, such as *Laertes* and *Faulconbridge*, and in a very happy mixture of the occasional debauchee and the gentleman of feeling, as in SHAKSPEARE'S *Cassio* and *Charles Oakley* in the *Jealous Wife*.

In theatric love, in that, complaining softness with which the fancies of young ladies adorn their imaginary heroes, MR. CHARLES KEMBLE is certainly the first performer on the stage. He seems resolved to make up for his brother's utter deficiency in this respect. His performance of *Romeo* would undoubtedly be superior to that of MR. ELLISTON, could he shake off his indolent languor. Fondness of attitude and looks of abstracted endearment acquire an additional charm, from his dignified and graceful aspect and from that reposing command in the air of his head and shoulders, which reminds us of the placid dignity of the ANTINOUS. But this languor is occasionally so unhappy, that his attention to his mistress appears to be a painful effort, and instead of being tender from amatory feeling betrays a kind of civil pity for the poor lady, the true *comis in uxorem* of HORACE.

That this weariness or affected patience of manner is not natural to the actor, but the mere result of bad habit, may be easily seen in the animation of his *Laertes* and his *Faulconbriage*. If in the former character he has little to display but personal spirit, in the latter he exhibits a very bold spirit of raillery, a gay insolence justified by the contemptibility of it's object. It is with much skill that he suddenly bursts into a proud ridicule

of the *Duke of Austria*, without indulging in the flourish of fist which common actors mistake for indignation: he does not, like a South-sea warrior, waste half his strength on the enemy by a preliminary bravado of gesture. All great effects are produced by contrast. Anger is never so noble as when it breaks out of a comparative continence of aspect; it is the earthquake bursting from the repose of nature.

One could not well excuse, even in tragedy, that perpetual lightning of frown with which MR. CHARLES KEMBLE pierces the pit; and as to his perpetual bite of the lips, it is allowable to nobody but a young lady preparing her rosiest looks for company, or to a malicious and mean villain suddenly detected, or to a schoolboy perhaps when he is winding up his top. But this cloudiness of face, this system of frowning and biting is wonderfully misplaced in comedy; the νεφελαγέρετα Ζευς, the cloud-compelling Jove, is not the god of levity. What with the lamps and the rouge, his eyes may indeed acquire much ferocious decision and brightness, but he would lose no reputation by leaving to MR. H. JOHNSTON the judgment of turning mere "meditation to madness." A frank youth, like *Frederick Bramble* in the *Poor Gentleman*, a character which MR. C. KEMBLE otherwise performs with

most appropriate spirit, never thinks of this gloomy stare, which amounts to the expression of an afflicted conscience; nor does a gay villain, like *Plastic* in *Town and Country*, make his resolutions with a countenance that might betray him to the slightest observer. MR. C. KEMBLE's ironical contempt of *Reuben Glenroy*'s advice in this character, and of *Sir Charles Cropland* in *Frederick Bramble*, is in the happiest wonderment of tone: his languor becomes a beauty when thrown into the careless slur and patient acquiescence of his replies. Any cool humourist would talk in the same way. But what should we think of a man, who when he was meditating on the choice of a watch-string should dart into the most terrific side-frowns; or when he was asked whether he preferred pudding or pie, should knit his brows into an agony of logical doubt?

Guest, (after frowning with downward meditation). Madam, I will take a little pie.—*(aside, after receiving the pie and frowning with awful study).* I am not sure that pudding would'nt have been better.

I was sorry to see that MR. C. KEMBLE could not help carrying this ludicrous fault into his most careless intoxication: his representation of a superior sort of drunkard would otherwise be perfect. It is this representation which renders his

Charles Oakley and his *Cassio* such finished and original performances. To amuse us, and at the same time to maintain our respect in intoxication, might be thought an impossibility, if he did not do both in these characters. But with all that relaxation of limb, which seems so destructive of gentlemanly appearance, with all that relaxation of countenance which is the very reverse of sensible expression, with all that gay disdain of common customs and civilities which wine inspires, he contrives not only to appear respectable but even to interest our feelings. I have seen him, when representing a fond husband who had been seduced into a debauch, absolutely borrow a pathos from this odious vice, and in the midst of his careless nonsense turn to his wife with a voice so quarrelling with himself, so broken between gaiety and remorse, so painful in it's attempt to be strongly affectionate, that the contrast of his graces with his defects, of his powers with his wishes, of his love for his wife and his heartfelt inability to express it, reached all the domestic feelings of his audience. It is the same with his *Cassio*, whose remorse appears so much the stronger from his inability to rid himself of the debauch which he abhors. There is no actor, who imitates this defect with such a total want of affectation. All the other performers wish to be humourous drunk-

ards, and by this error they cannot help showing a kind of abstract reasoning which defeats their purpose. They play a hundred anticks with legs which a drunkard would be unable to lift, they make a thousand grimaces which the jaws of a drunkard could not attempt from mere want of tone; they roll about from place to place, though his whole strength is exerted to command his limbs; they wish in short to appear drunk, when the great object of a drunkard is to appear sober.

MR. CHARLES KEMBLE is upon the whole a very gentlemanly and useful actor, with much of graceful mediocrity and with an occasional display of great genius. It appears to me, that his unfortunate languor hides his real ability, and that, like a giant oppressed with sleepiness, he sinks to the level of feebler men. When I call him an useful actor, I do not apply the epithet like those newspapers, who bestow it on every actor that can do a number of things tolerably, and nothing well. Not that I would question, as to matters of stage convenience, the utility, much less the genius of any gentleman, who would undertake to read a book at a moment's notice: but MR. C. KEMBLE is useful to the audience, as well as to the managers; if he undertakes a character not originally his own, he gives us it's moral effects as well as it's discourse; he gives us not only the face but

the soul of his person, not only it's gesticulation but it's proper impulse. A bad actor may be defined as an animal, who utters a certain number of sounds to exercise the patience of a certain number of people.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

Page 10.—[*those complacent stares at the audience which occupy inferior actors.*] Extract from the NEWS.

One of the first studies of an actor should be to divest himself of his audience, to be occupied not with the persons he is amusing, but with the persons he is assisting in the representation. But of all simple requisites to the mimetic art, this public abstraction seems to be the least attained. Our good performers are too fond of knowing they are good ones, and of acknowledging the admiration of the spectators by glances of important expression: our bad performers are vainer still, because ignorance is always vain, and because not being able to enter into the interest of the scene they must look for interest elsewhere. These men in reality never speak to one another, but to the pit and to the boxes: they are thinking, not what the person spoken to will reply, but what the audience think of their own speeches: they never speak a soliloquy, because soliloquies are addressed to one's self, and they always address their solitary meditations to the house: they adjust their neck-cloths; they display their

pocket-handkerchiefs and their attitudes; they cast side long glances, and say to themselves, "There's a lady in the stage-box contemplating my shape! The critics in the pit are astonished at my ease! My character sits well on me, and so do my small clothes!" But let us imagine the scene, in which this extravagance is performed, to be a real room enclosed in four walls, for such a room the actor himself ought to imagine it. What then is he looking at all this time? He is casting side glances at a wainscot, or ogling a corner cup-board.

The principal errors in local propriety may be divided into

Glancing at the boxes,
Ajusting the dress,
Telling the audience their soliloquies,
Wearing their hats in rooms, and
Not wearing them in the open air.

This last fault is almost as general as the first, and twice as ridiculous. We have mentioned it before, but reproof cannot be too often repeated to those who are not accustomed to correct themselves hastily. It is evident, that when an actor comes into a field or into the street with his hat in his hand, he thinks nothing of the scene in which he is engaged, but of the audience before him, for whom he testifies his respect by uncovering his head, just as he would behave in a room full of company; though this very same man, when he appears in a room on the stage, shall be covered. Were he to carry these mistakes into real life, how ridiculous would be the effects! What would be thought of a man who should stalk into a drawing-room with his hat on, or walk the public streets with it under his arm?

These local inconsistencies are innumerable; they abound in every performance and in almost every actor and diminish the interest of the scene, not only to the critics who can account for the diminution, but imperceptibly to the whole audience, who feel a loss of pleasure without knowing the reason. They are the more inexcusable as they are easily corrected, and merit some concise reproof from the audience: a few words from the critical benches near the orchestra, or a shout of "Put on your hat!" from the galleries, might end them at once. The rough criticism of the galleries may not indeed be very pleasant to an actor, but he should take care not to deserve it.

Page 12.—[*to allow no accent but what pleases his caprice or his love of innovation.*] Extract from the NEWS.

We are amazed that the audience do not contrive some means of noticing MR. KEMBLE's vicious orthöepy. He appears to alter the pronunciation of his words merely for the sake of alteration. There is no rule for pronunciation but custom, and this rule he perpetually violates in a manner that would be highly amusing, did it not injure some of the finest sentences of our tragic poets. This defect has gradually increased on the stage, and the other actors, thinking it perhaps a mark of their invention to clip and coin in this way, are sometimes totally unintelligible. A man who utters one of these affectations in company would be set down by his hearers as a person unfortunate in a country dialect. Let us conceive for instance two gentlemen in conversation, making use of the language of MR. KEMBLE and these

other actors, and the astonishment of a third person overhearing them. We will suppose, that an officer of the regiment, which has just been ordered to let the beard grow on the upper lip, is accosted by a fashionable friend: ——

A. Ha, Captain how dost? (1) The appearance would be much improved by a little more attention to (2) the (3) bird.

B. Why, so I think: there's no (4) sentimint in a (5) bird. But then it serves to distinguish the soldier, and there is no doubt much military (6) vartue in looking (7) furful.

A. But the girls, Jack, the girls! Why (8) the mouth is enough to banish kissing from the (9) airth (10) etairnally.

B. In (11) mairey, no more of that! Zounds, but the shopkeepers and the (12) marchants will get the better of us with the dear souls! However, as it is now against military law to have a tender countenance, and as some (13) birds, I thank heaven, are of a tolerable (14) quaality, I must make a (15) vartue of necessity, and as I can't look soft for the love of my girl, I must e'en look (16) hijjus for the love of my country.

Further extract from the News.

Is it not a pity that an actor, who can give such dignity to what is worthy of being dignified, should by an indiscriminate importance level it with meaner matter? The following lines were delivered with almost as heroic

(1) thy. (2) thy. (3) beard. (4) sentiment. (5) beard. (6) virtue. (7) fearful. (8) thy (9) earth. (10) eternally. (11) mercy. (12) merchants. (13) beards. (14) quality. (15) virtue. (16) hideous.

a resolution as the last: *Coriolanus* means to be familiar; but Mr. Kemble is—what shall we say? is still Mr. Kemble:—

> *Cor.* I will go wash:
> And when my face is fair, you shall perceive
> Whether I blush or no.

The word *fair* might positively have been measured by a stop-watch: instead of being a short monosyllable, it became a word of tremendous elongation. We can describe the pronunciation by nothing else than by such a sound as *fay-er-r-r.* Luckily for our fastidious, or as Mr. Kemble would say, our *fastidjus* ears, we had no opportunity of hearing *bird* for *beard*; but it was in vain to expect any repose in orthöepy, when Mr. Kemble had gotten such a word as *Anfidius* to transmogrify. This he universally called *Anfidjus*, like a young lady who talks of her *ojus* lover, or the *ojus* month of November. The name too of *Coriolanus* is divided by Mr. Kemble with syllabical precision into five distinct sounds, though the general pronunciation, as well as Shakspeare himself, shortens the *rio* into one syllable, as in the word *chariot*: the alteration is of no effect, but to give a stiffness to what is already too stiff, and to render many of the poet's lines harsh and unmetrical. It is unlucky for Mr. Kemble's audience, that he never meets with a line, in which this absurdity would be too frequently glaring to be endured. We should like to hear Mr. Kemble repeat the following lines: we will suppose he is in the manager's room addressing a rascally Jew with a thin beard, who wishes to purchase some of the worn out seas and thunder of the stage:—

> *The varchus*, Jew, is scanty as *the bird*,
> *Ay-y-y*, and *the* heart as black; *the* very cloaths bag,

Pregnant with rottenness, is *fay-er-r-r* unto't,
Though stuff'd with all the *furful marchandize*
Of shirt purloin'd, or shoes, or milk-white shift,
Once wrapping heav'n, now wrapp'd with *airthly* things,
Nankeens perchance, or buckskins saddle-proof,
Or plush, or worse than all, rough corderoys
Six-stringed, that on the musical knock-knees
Of 'prentice-boy seducer, toiling fast
Through dust and sunshine to the hill of Greenwich,
Charm'd with *melojus* creaks the easy maid.
Nay, get thee gone: I've nothing for thee, Jew,
Nor tinsel crown, nor tyger wheel-emboweil'd
Furful with painted deal-board, nor the steeds
Centaur revers'd, prancing on human legs,
Nor mine heroic sheep's-blood, nor the hosts
Of pasteboard war, nor mustard-bowl, nor bullet
" Grating harsh thunder," nor an ounce of rosin
Pow'rful alike on billowy seas of tin
To flash dread light, or soften fiddle-strings.
Nay, get thee gone!—
It doth abuse my mother tongue to talk wi'thee,
Ojus, insijjus, hijjus, and *perfijjus!*

Of MRS. SIDDONS in *Volumnia* we have nothing to say, but in our usual style of praise. The Roman matron had all her proper dignity, but it was not the unbending pomp which an inferior actress would have affected; MRS. SIDDONS knows when to lift her countenance into commanding majesty, and when to fall into the familiarity of domestic ease. This lady and her brother are nature and art personified.

MUNDEN in *Menenius* had a great deal of the humourous buffoon about him, but nothing of the patrician friend of *Coriolanus*. SIMMONS in the factious citizen would have done well when he ridiculed the haughty chief, to imitate the voice as well as the manner of KEMBLE.

Why MRS. HUMPHRIES or MISS BRUNTON is lifted into a heroine, when the theatre possesses MISS SMITH, is past

common logic to discover. This is like Mr. Kemble's pronunciation: he might pronounce as well as any man, but he prefers giving us something bad, to make a contrast, we suppose, with what is good.

Further extract from the News.

An ESSAY on INVENTION in PRONUNCIATION.

Coriolanus.—So shall my lungs
Coin words till their decay.
SHAKSPEARE.

The critics from time immemorial have agreed, that invention is the first qualification and mark of genius; but it is certain they have not thoroughly comprehended the nature of this invention. Those who would confine it to what is usually understood by the word *originality*, are evidently mistaken; for by this simple definition they would persuade us that none were great geniuses but Homer, Milton, Shakspeare, and a few other originals; but the fact is, that invention displays itself by two beauties instead of one, *originality* and *singularity*; though it must be confessed, that the nature of these beauties is essentially the same, their possessors equally agreeing to differ from the rest of mankind. It is inconceivable how infinitely this true definition of genius will increase the literary glory of Great Britain; the drama for instance will be proud not only of Congreve, Wycherley, and Sheridan, but of D'Urfey, Shadwell, Reynolds, Cherry, Dibdin, and a thousand others, whom the malice of ignorant critics would have condemned to eternal oblivion: in fact a new world of genius will burst upon our view; in Doctor Mavor we shall find an excellent

biographer, in Mr. Robert Heron a most dispassionate historian, in Mr. Capel Loft a critic amiably impartial; to be brief, in every street-ballad the spirit of wandering Homer, and in every stupid pretender a genius of consummate modesty.

If by these means we discover a great number of geniuses in writing, we shall find a still greater number in speaking. That oratorical body, the mob, has always exhibited a peculiar felicity in the invention of dialects, as the writer of the Cant-Dictionary has elegantly exemplified; but in pronunciation few have excelled the daring imagination of Mr. Kembee, of Covent-garden, who seems determined not only to render himself altogether unintelligible, but to introduce a new language on the stage, and make Shakspeare and Congreve as difficult of comprehension as if they had written in Coptic or Hindostanee. The reason of this is very simple: Mr. Kemble is determined to be thought a genius in all possible ways, and while he displays a happy originality in some of his stage performances, is determined to be *singular* where no man can be *original*. One circumstance would be a little unfortunate for Mr. Kemble, if with a spirit truly magnanimous he did not take a pleasure in difficulties. There will always be some envious critics obstinate enough to maintain that no man can pretend to dictate to society it's mode of pronunciation; that if Sheridan, or Walker, or Jones were to give his opinion in the course of conversation on the pronunciation of any word, this opinion would be no more than that of an individual not very learned; and therefore that no such man, nor indeed any other, either in public writing or speaking, is warranted to insist on a favourite mode of his own; for as intelligibility of speech is the concern of the

majority, the majority alone can decide what is convenient or inconvenient to their mutual understanding. But, like other superior geniuses, MR. KEMBLE despises the majority, and is ambitious of pleasing the chosen few only, who without doubt, if there be any such, are very few indeed, and very great linguists. What but very learned ears could have found any possible meaning in MR. KEMBLE's conversation of the word *aches* into *aitches*? If MR. KEMBLE wishes to shew his regard for SHAKSPEARE's metre by giving the proper quantity of syllables to the line,

Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,

it is somewhat strange that he should so often put the poet's feet out of joint, in *Coriolanus*. Were we to reason from analogy, and to divide the word *aches* into two syllables at all, we should certainly call it *a-kes*, since in words derived from the Greek, the *ch* before a vowel is, we believe, invariably pronounced like *k*, with the exception of *charity*, *archer*, and *schism*. But to supply all deficiencies of SHAKSPEARE's metre is a task for those verbal slaves only who would make CHAUCER's lines as exact as SWIFT's, and as MR. KEMBLE in his very systems is a daring rather than a plodding genius, and does not use this pronunciation from a regard either for SHAKSPEARE or the audience, we must attribute it to that self-possession or self-confidence which in all ages has enabled great men to be perfectly satisfied with themselves, though the whole world were unable to tell why.

Those facetious gentlemen, the lottery-office-keepers, whose newspaper advertisements afford so many fine specimens of the bathos, have with their usual disinterested fancy indorsed the play-hand-bills with divers literary eccentricities, that instruct us, when we have thrown away

half our money at Mr. Reynolds's farces, how to throw away the rest elsewhere. This example, we have had some thoughts of turning to account in our publication of the following Lexicon, so that every lady or gentleman, who should purchase a play-bill, might find a list of the performers on one side of it, and the means of understanding them on the other :—

aches, - - - - aitches.
beard, - - - - bird.
cheerful, - - - churful.
conscience, - - cunshince.
earth, - - - - airth.
err, - - - - - air, (and so in every recurrence of the syllables *er* and *ir*).
farewell, - - - farwell.
fearful, - - - - furful.
fierce, - - - - furse.
hideous, - - - - hijjus.
insidious, - - - insijjus.
innocence, - - - innocince
infirmity, - - infaremity.
leap, - - - - - lep.
leisure, - - - - leasure.
melodious, - - - melojus.
merchant, - - - marchant.
odious, - - - ojus.
perfidious, - - - perfijus, (and so in all adjectives ending with *dious*).
pierce, - - - - purse
prudence, - - - prudince.
quality, - - - - (the first syllable like that in the word *alimant*).
rode, - - - - - rod.
sovereign, - - suvran.
star, - - - - - stare.
thy, - - - - - the.
virgin, - - - - varjin.

you, - - - - - ye (that is, the plural for the singular number).

ye, - - - - - *jee*, after words ending with *d*, as *demanjee*, for *demana ye*; or *chee*, after words ending with *t*, as *hurchee* for *hurt ye*.

We are afraid that all our readers will not exactly agree with the arguments we have produced in favour of Mr. Kemble's genius for orthöepy. The English have an aukward conciseness about them, very unfavourable to these far-fetched eccentricities of genius; and the same spirit that makes them prefer a short cut through a lane to a circuitous walk round a fine street, will render them disgusted at these slow approaches of meaning, however pompous their manner and language. We have more than once felt for the distinct speaker, as he gave his dialect it's most methodical utterance, for

> There still remains, to mortify a wit,
> The many-headed monster of the pit;

and we should not be at all surprised if, on some tragic night, while Mr Kemble's genius is indulging itself, a few marks of illiterate contempt should produce an aukward catastrophe.

Page 20.—[*The Grecian Daughter.*] Extract from the News.

Murphy's tragedy of the *Grecian Daughter* was rendered interesting by the energetic performance of Mrs. Siddons, who like all great performers contradicts the old adage, *ex nihilo nil fit*; for in this character she certainly makes a great deal out of nothing. Her sudden start towards *Philotas* and mute prostration to the

ground to thank him for saving her father's life, was sublime. Murphy was no poet; his only talent, which was an excellent one, lay in humour, and he will be for ever remembered as the author of the first farce in the English language the *Citizen*. His Tragedy of the *Grecian Daughter* is one tissue of common place ideas, and common-place expressions; the incidents which he has borrowed from tradition are affecting, but he has very little else of tragedy except it's language, which abounds in pompous lines and hackneied invocations to the gods. If there are any good sentiments they are not his own; Murphy was a man of learning, and has called Homer and Plato to assist him in sentimentalizing his tragedies, as he made Plautus and Terence laugh for him in his pieces of humour. There is but one original thought, at least we believe it to be original, in this whole tragedy; it is the idea of *Philotas* on hearing that *Evander* had been saved from starvation by his daughter's milk.: —

> —— All her laws
> Inverted quite, great Nature triumphs still!

This sentence which would have been passed over amidst innumerable beauties in Shakspeare, shines like a star from the cloudy dullness of Murphy's tragedy.

Page 23.—[*Is to the newspapers.*] Extract from the News.

The reason of the production and reproduction of modern plays is at present not a little obscure: it can hardly be the interest of the Managers, for their views in that case are never attained; it cannot be the beauty of the

author, for beautiful authors there are none; it cannot be the pleasure of the town, for the town cannot be pleased with what it invariably condemns. Let us lift the curtain a little, and glance into the machinery of theatrical politics. Paucity of contribution is certainly not the cause of these miserable productions, for the Manager has his chests full of manuscript dramas; all of these he cannot bring to light, and it is well no doubt that most of them are locked up in everlasting sleep, fated never to give sleep to others. But in all this mighty mass is there nothing worthy of consideration, is there nothing that can deliver us from such dramatic opiates as the *Delinquent* and the *Prior Claim*, and teach us to keep our eyes open, instead of yawning out our disapprobation and wishing for our nightcaps? No doubt there is, but the Manager can do nothing: we must suppose indeed that he can distinguish good writing from bad, for if he cannot he is not fit for his situation; but he may find twenty good pieces, acknowledge their merit, and yet he shall do nothing. We will explain this. A bad writer, who cannot trust to the intrinsic merit of his productions for their success, has a thousand manœuvres to supply the deficiency. In the first place, he scrapes acquaintance with all the actors, one after another, invites them to dinner, takes tickets on their benefit-nights, and praises their jokes; these habits beget familiarity, familiarity is the twin-brother of confidence, and in the glow of some fifth pint after dinner our author produces a manuscript written by himself *purposely for the display of the peculiar talents of his theatrical friends:* his theatrical friends are enchanted, he becomes a haunter of the green-room, and the Manager at length accepts his piece, though he knows no more of the talents of the

writer, than his drollery at a dinner, his turn of a pun, or his slapping the actors on the shoulder and calling them Dick, Jack, and Harry. Our author has now nothing to think of but the first night; every goose that he hears reminds him of the pit, and every oath, of damnation; he flies to the newspaper offices, and scrapes acquaintance with those goodnatured paragraphists who cheat the town by false criticism out of pure love for their friends, or what is the same thing, their friends' suppers: one he invites to a bottle, a second he praises for his learning and wit, and to a third he whispers, "*Box tickets—no reserve—all your friends!*" Having thus secured all quarters, and well stocked the galleries with those strong-lunged idlers who for the consideration of a few tickets are always at the service of a timid author, he ventures his piece on the public: the actors exert themselves to admiration, the applause that follows is given not to the excellence of the dialogue, but to the excellence of it's delivery, and the goodnatured audience in spite of a few discerning hissers are unwilling to send supperless to bed the miserable scribbler, who begs and prays them so hard in his prologue. The next day all the papers are in raptures, and the old obliging criticism comes forward:—"*Last night a new piece—from the fertile pen of Mr. So-and-so—wit—genuine nature—dialogue piquant—incidents chaste—originality—Mr. **** was excellent—Mrs. **** looked charmingly—great eclat—crowded house—promises to be a great favourite.*" In two weeks the piece creeps into it's grave; the author however, being a friend of the actors, and as it were *naturalized* in the green-room, grows like a bad habit upon the Manager, and toils every year to be applauded by the papers and to be forgotten by posterity. Such is the origin of the Reynoldses, the Dibdins, and the

Arnolds of the day, and such are the reasons that influence Managers in their studies to please the public. Such too must have been the influence of Mr. Lewis in prevailing on the Managers to revive his prosaic tragedy. This gentleman is more successful as a follower of Mrs. Radcliffe in the fields of romance. Though his genius at times appears to have been nourished in a charnel-house, and he too often mistakes the disgusting for the terrific, yet it is some praise to a modern romance-writer that he can throw interest into hobgoblin-stories and alarums of the nursery. In an age however that can boast but three genuine poets, Mr. Lewis has no pretensions to the Parnassian laurel; his genius forsakes him when his steps begin to tread metrically, and his tragedy of *Alfonso*, in it's antiquity of imagery and it's inanity of language, serves but to add another proof to the melancholy truth, that there is no British tragic poet existing. Of the universal decline indeed of the English drama every day brings stronger conviction, and it becomes the duty of the conductors of the stage to discourage the future attempts of those who are hastening it's declension. We yield to no nation upon earth in the glory of the conqueror's laurel, why should we in that of the poet's? If the Manager would say that it is impossible to find a dramatic genius, he will not say the truth: let encouragement but call them forth, and they will appear. The profoundest ages of ignorance owed all their sleep, not to the actual decline of the human mind, but to circumstances that narrowed it's scope of action. The ministers of France in the seventeenth century loved the arts, and they raised what is called the Age of Lewis the Fourteenth: Augustus wished to be immortal; he opened the sunshine of his court to literary genius, and

his reign is mortalized under the title of the AUGUSTAN Age.

It has been said, that we are sometimes too severe in our dramatic strictures. To be severe is not our will but our necessity; the fault lies not in us but in those unhappy authors who

——————————— in spite
Of nature and their stars will write.

It is ludicrous enough, that a man should produce something contemptible and then quarrel with us for our contempt: a criminal who had been found guilty at the bar might as well express his astonishment at the want of feeling in the judge. Let the Managers present the public with something that shall do honour to their own judgment, and the town would see with what pleasure we should give them the sanction of ours. It is the boast of the writer of this article that his opinions have been guided by nothing but a regard for truth, for the real pleasure of the town, and for the literary reputation of Englishmen; and it is his happiness that these opinions have been approved by the public. He was severe indeed with the *Prior Claim*, when the daily papers were not; he ridiculed the *Delinquent*, when the daily papers saw nothing ridiculous in it. Who was right? The *Prior Claim* died in a few days after his criticism, and the *Delinquent* has followed it to the grave. It is time to rescue the critical character of the public prints from the charge of carelessness, of ignorance, and of corruption; they are the directors of the public taste and the correctors of it's depravation, and they should study to deserve the confidence of those whom they would instruct. As long as there is nothing to praise, the Dramatic Critic of the *News*

must continue to blame: the task of correcting the stage in it's present vitiated state is no doubt a difficult one, but if he shall have contributed to crush one wretched play, or to shame one wretched author, his efforts will have been sufficiently rewarded; and he is resolved, that if the somniferous dramatists will suffer him to keep his eyes open and hold his pen, and while he is honoured with the public attention,

> ——————— no dull dramatic knave
> Shall walk the stage in quiet to his grave.

Extract from a subsequent Essay in the NEWS.

Etiquette like Fate has an unlimited sway, and like most despotic rulers, it does not always give a reason for what it commands: we have never heard a single good argument why the plays on benefit nights should not be criticised, but as etiquette forbids us to criticise them, and as the Theatres are just now occupied with nothing else, we can say nothing further.

Whenever we obtain, however, an interval in criticism, we are not idle; we study the criticisms of others, we meditate on those profound theatrical essays which adorn the Daily Papers, and which, like all productions of real wit, boast so inimitable a brevity, and though we cannot think of imitating, yet we take the greatest pains to understand them. From these studies we have gathered some important maxims, which we cannot forbear to communicate to the public; they are unlike the maxims of ROCHEFOUCAULT, for they are perfectly benevolent; they are unlike the maxims of SENECA, for they are perfectly true; and they are unlike the maxims of the Wise Men of Greece, for they are perfectly original: one or two in-

deed of those profound sages did certainly make some new observations, for one of them said that *nothing should be done without an opportunity*, and another gave it as his opinion, that *many men were evil*: but these are sayings that, with all their genius, will be of no vast service to the world, while every lover of literature must be struck with the original advantages that may be derived from the following

RULES FOR THE THEATRICAL CRITIC OF A NEWSPAPER.

In the first place—Never take any notice whatever of the author of a play or of the play itself, unless it be a new one: if the author be living, it is most probable you will have no reason to speak of him more than once, and if he be not living, you have no reason to speak of him at all, for dead men cannot give dinners.

Secondly—Indulge an acquaintance with every dramatic writer and with every actor, and you will have a noble opportunity of shewing your fine feelings and your philanthropy, for you will praise every play that is acted and every actor that plays: depend upon it, the world will attribute this praise solely to your undeviating benevolence, which is a great virtue.

Thirdly—If an audience should not possess this virtue equally with yourselves, but should barbarously hiss a new piece merely because it could not entertain them, say in your next day's criticism, that it would have been infinitely more entertaining if a little had been added, or a little had been taken away, a probability which few will dispute with you. No man of real feeling will think of damning another merely because the latter cannot succeed in every attempt to please him. If the exclama-

tion *bravo!* will make a man enjoy his supper and put a few pounds into his pocket every winter, who would not cry out *bravo?* Suppose an ugly whimsical fellow were to accost you in the streets and to say, "Sir, I'd thank you to tell me I am handsome, or I shall be miserable for months to come," you would undoubtedly say, "Sir, I am enchanted with your appearance, and entreat you to be perfectly happy." In the same manner it is easy to say to Mr. Reynolds, or Mr. Dibdin, or Mr. Cherry, "Your play was excellent," and the poor fellow will be as comfortable as if it were really the case.

Fourthly—If you do not exactly understand how to conceal your evil opinion of men's writings or performances, but find yourself occasionally apt to indulge in maliciously speaking the truth, always say the direct contrary of what you think. The following little glossary, collected from the most approved critics, may be of service to you in this case; you will of course make use of the first column:

A crowded house—a theatre on the night of a performance, when all the back seats and upper boxes are empty.

An amusing author—an author whose very seriousness makes us laugh in spite of himself.

A successful author—an author who has been damned only four times out of five.

A good author———the general term for an author who gives good dinners.

A respectable actor—an insipid actor; one who in general is neither hissed nor applauded.

A fine actor———one who makes a great noise; a tatterdemalion of passions; a clap-trapper: one intended by nature

for a town-crier. This appellation may on all occasions be given to Mr. Pope, who has the finest lungs of any man on the stage.

A good actor———the general term for an actor who gives good dinners.

A charming play——a play full of dancing, music, and scenery; a play in which the less the author has to do, the better.

Great applause———applause mixed with the hisses of the gallery and pit.

Unbounded and universal applause—applause mixed with the hisses of the pit only. This phrase is frequently to be found at the bottom of the play-house bills in declaring the reception a new piece has met with. The plays announced in these bills are generally printed in red-ink, an emblem, no doubt, of the modesty with which they speak of themselves.

There was once a kind soul of an author who could not bear to use a harsh word, even when speaking of villains; he used to call highwaymen *tar-gatherers*, pickpockets *collectors*, and ravishers *men of gallantry*. This gentleman would have made an excellent theatrical critic; he would have called Reynolds Congreve, and Cherry Shakspeare, and every body would have admired his invention.

Fifthly, and lastly—When you criticise the performance of an old play, never exceed six or seven lines, but be sure to notice by name the Fashionables in the boxes, for such notices are indispensably requisite to sound criticism: there is a choice collection of sentences which have been in use time immemorial with newspaper critics, and are

still used by common consent, just as we universally allow one style for a note of hand or a visiting letter. Your observations, therefore, will generally be such as these:

DRURY-LANE.—Last night the *beautiful* comedy of the *Rivals* was performed with great eclat to an *overflowing* house: BANNISTER was excellent—MRS. H. JOHNSTON, looked *beautiful*.—Among the company we observed the Duchess of GORDON, the Duke of QUEENSBURY, Lady HAMILTON, and many other *amiable* and *beautiful* personages. There was a quarrel in the Pit.

What can be more concise, more explanatory, more critical, than such a criticism? Grammarians undertake to teach a language in five months, Musicians the whole theory of music in five weeks, and Dancing-masters all sorts of steps in five hours, but by these rules a man may be a profound critic in five minutes. Let ARISTOTLE and QUINTILIAN hide their huge volumes in dismay, and confess the superiority of a criticism, which, like the magic word *Sesame* in the Arabian Nights, opens to us a thousand treasures in a breath!

Page 45.—[*It was the opinion of* TASSONI]

MR. HAYLEY with his usual goodnature calls the author of the Rape of the Bucket, the "courteous TASSONI;" but this epithet does not seem to be generally applicable. TASSONI seems to have been severe in his judgment and inclined to view things in their most unpropitious light: in his meditations even on the ladies, he cannot help indulging his malicious fastidiousness, and losing all the natural gallantry of a poet gives this blunt reason "perche le donne vadano vestite di lungo," "why ladies wear long

gowns:" " Le vesti lunghe sono introdotte fra le donne per coprir le difformità del corpo, essendocene gran numero, che, se andassero vestite de panni corti, giammai non troverrebbono marito; e molte parti nascose si stimano belle, che, se scoperte si potessero rimirare, apparirebbono tutto il contrario." " Women have introduced the custom of wearing long gowns to conceal the deformites of their shape, for there are a multitude of girls, who in short cloaths would never find husbands; there are many parts of their figure which in concealment appear beautiful, that once emerged from their hiding-places would totally derange our good opinion."

Page 75.—[*Iknow not how to account*] Extract from the NEWS.

The majority of an audience were certainly never deluded into a belief, that events represented on the stage were realities. The best actors, who are the most likely to produce such a delusion, are always the most applauded; but it is evident they would gain no applause, were their assumed character forgotten; for in common life we do not clap any incident that pleases us in the streets, nor cry out "bravo" at a pathetic circumstance in a room. A rustic, perhaps, who knew nothing of the machinery and trick of the stage, might be momentarily deceived; but the dream would soon be removed by the frequent cessations of the entertainment, and particularly the alteration of scene, so badly managed at the theatre, where you see two men running violently towards each other, with half a castle or a garden in their grasp. Though it is impossible however, and indeed generally considered it would be unpleasant, to maintain this illu-

pression of reality, the imitation of life and manners should be as exact as possible, for the same cause that we are pleased with our just resemblance in a glass, though we are convinced that it is a mere resemblance. But the most consummate actor gains but half his effect, if his eloquent imitation is not assisted by the mute imitations of dress and of scenery. A man for instance, who in his countenance and his action could display to perfection the mind of the great Alfred, would make a singular impression, if his dress were made after the fashion of the reign of George the Third, and his room after that of Queen Elizabeth's. Yet the chronological absurdities of the present stage are scarcely less laughable than such a compound. *Alexander* indeed does not rave now in a cocked-hat and jack-boots; *Timoleon* does not frown in a profusion of periwig; nor does *Cleopatra* wanton in an enormity of hoop-petticoat. But though times and countries are not set at this open defiance, their proprieties are unaccountably neglected.

Perhaps there is not a single performer, who knows how to dress with perfect propriety, except Mrs. Siddons, who is excellently classical and just in this respect. Mr. Ellistron, and Mr. Kemble and his brother Charles are more attentive to their apparel than the generality of actors; but the second is at all times too fond of a glare of ornament, and we have seen both the brothers in the parts of modern gentlemen flaming in Court-dresses on the most common occasions. As to the other actors, their absurdities in dress are innumerable, and are observable every night of a performance. Old men of the present day are hardly ever without the laced coats and flapped waistcoats of the last century. The ladies wear spangled gowns and ostrich feathers upon all occasions,

and the beaux appear in the streets with frogs instead of plain buttons, cocked hats instead of round ones, and swords when nobody wears a sword but at court. Of all beauish dressers, however, Mr. Lewis is the most faulty and the least excusable, because he is an actor of great experience as well as genius; this gentleman seems to delight in uncouth habiliments, and not unfrequently astonishes the audience by appearing as a beau in a coat chequered with ribs and enlivened with variegated colours: of what age or of what country such coat may be, we know not; all that we can discover is, that it is more like the dress of an ancient French footman than of a modern English gentleman.

Page 90.—[*Lord Ogleby* in the *Clandestine Marriage*.] Extract from the News.

The Comedy of the *Clandestine Marriage*, the production of Garrick and Colman, was revived at this theatre (Haymarket) on Wednesday night, for which we are very sorry. The manager has generally been successful in his revivals; but whatever honour he might have intended his father in the re-production of this play, the performers certainly did not assist him in his design. Perhaps however the fame of the elder Colman has not so peculiar a right to be interested in the *Clandestine Marriage*; for it's internal evidence, we believe, will not attribute it's original beauties to that author. Colman was a man of individually correct rather than universally powerful observation, of a classical rather than original genius; he came to his dramatic studies with a mind full of the genius of others, and capable of applying what he had read to what

he had seen; conscious of his want of originality, he seems to have taken no pains to avoid imitation; he is content to borrow the perception of greater geniuses where his own eye-sight fails him, and tells the stories of dramatists and essayists, of English and French novelists, with the same felicity and the same unconcern of acknowledgement. As he was destined to be a writer of mere judgment, that judgment cannot be denied him in it's most exact correctness; what he himself understood well, he made others understand well; for his language is always unaffected and appropriate, and he has the art of confining the observations of others to their proper objects. Thus the attack of his satire does not alarm with it's novelty, but the weapon grows steadier in his hands; and while he directs it's point with precision, he displays the happiest graces of gesture. It is from this want of originality, and at the same time this art of managing his originals, that we are inclined to attribute the most original part of the *Clandestine Marriage* to GARRICK.

We certainly imagine that the fame of GARRICK as an actor has been injurious to his reputation as a writer. All the world were capable of admiring him in the former character, and therefore they talked more of it. People are indeed unwilling to believe that a man can excel in two things at a time: when VOLTAIRE produced his first comedy, he carefully concealed the author's name, because he had succeeded in tragedy. But no man had better opportunities of studying the manners of the lively world than GARRICK, and no man entered it with a mind more eager of observation: it was the business of his life to study mankind, and his universal powers of imitation prove that he succeeded. There is an unfortunate something about the profession of an actor, that does not in-

spire us with the profoundest respect, probably because the generality of actors have lived foolishly, and shewn so little of their sense off the stage; but it cannot be denied that an universal mimic, a man who exhibited the features of human life in all their vivacity and variety of expression, must have well understood the human mind; a great actor does not copy faces like a portrait-painter; he makes a countenance for the mind, and not, like an artist, studies to make a mind for the countenance. It was said of GARRICK by JOHNSON, who was not eager to praise him or any body else, that he was "the first man in the world for sprightly conversation;" and to pay a compliment to a man's powers of conversation, is to pay a compliment not only to his variety of information, but to his knowledge of the mind; he who does not understand human nature will find it difficult to support and to please in a long conversation. In short, as GARRICK possessed the greater fancy, he was a greater genius than COLMAN, and may very safely claim the original conception of that character in the *Clandestine Marriage*, whose author has been so much disputed: GARRICK conceived, COLMAN wrote; and thus the proper offices were assigned to the man of genius and the man of judgment.

The comedy after all is not remarkable for it's originality either of character or sentiment. Every thing is natural, every person is in his proper place, and every incident happens at it's proper time; an equable spirit of humour pervades the whole action, and too much could not have been said of the managerial artifice of GARRICK in adapting the incidents to the stage, for no incidents have a less theatrical air. The only originality appears in the character of *Lord Ogleby*, who is conceived with much liveliness and painted with a colour that inferior

artists would have made gaudy. His Lordship is not merely an old battered gallant, for such a character any body might have conceived, but he is the gentleman and the man of honour; if he gives into the frivolities of fashion, they have corrupted neither his understanding nor his heart; if he undertakes to conquer the affections of a young lady, he also undertakes to marry her; and if he keeps a Swiss valet at his elbow to praise his complexion and laugh at his jokes, he has sense enough to despise him for his pains: he gives one the idea of a man spoiled by rank and riches, who would have been a solid ornament to society had he been any thing else but a lord. Such a character may deservedly give an original reputation to GARRICK; yet we cannot but attribute it's equability and truth of humour to COLMAN, whom we consider upon the whole as the *writer* of the play.

From the new performers we expected nothing, and we found little more. We never saw a failure so utterly unfortunate as the *Lord Ogleby* of FAWCETT: the boisterous vivacity of this actor can at no time adapt itself to the feebleness of old age, and as to any appearance of the courtier in his figure, we might as well look for roses in a stone-wall. He was always in extremes; if the old man undertook to be gay, he became noisy and vigorous; if he was arrested in his gaiety by a sudden twinge of gout or twist of palsy, he dropped into as impotent an agony as if his last hour was arrived. At his first entrance his voice and his manner were sufficiently feeble, but when the galleries began to laugh he thought he must make some better exertion, and his vigour amplified in proportion as it ought to have exhausted itself: you might have watched the climax of his strength gradually rising through the whole of the play, till at last he was an old man in ec-

thing but his wrinkles and his walking-stick. In short, he was not an old man attempting to be young, but a young one attempting to be old.

Page 101.—[the *Three and the Deuce.*] Extract from the NEWS.

The opera of the *Three and the Deuce*, which was revived on Monday for the benefit of MR. MATHEWS, was repeated to a crowded audience on Thursday evening. The humour of this piece is founded on the exact personal resemblance of three brothers to each other, which as usual causes much ludicrous confusion, especially with a valet belonging to the eldest, who continually mistakes the other two for his master, and is astonished at his sudden and unaccountable changes of character. This is a very ancient subject of the drama, and belongs more properly to broad farce, since it is as unnatural in it's progress and developement as it is productive of whimsical situation. Who the author of the present laughable piece is, we cannot determine, but from internal evidence, we should attribute it to MR. COLMAN:* there is the same dry pleasantry, the same rapid succession of

* I have since learned with pleasure, that Mr. Prince Hoare imitated this drama from the Spanish. When this gentleman has been original, I have always reckoned him among our worst dramatists, but in his imitation he has caught a better spirit. With respect to the drama, he is like Addison and Johnson in their poetical character; of no powers in himself, but powerful in translation, powerful with the strength of others. As Mr. Hoare is also an elegant prose writer, and possesses much taste in the fine arts, I am happy to bear away his name from the list of those mere farce writers with whom he has so often been confounded. He is the Aaron Hill of the modern *Dunciad.*

comic ideas, the same forcible dashing of character, as in his most humourous productions; we should imagine at least that it has received some touches from his lively pencil, and as to one or two of the songs, if we had heard them sung in Kamschatka, or accompanied by a nose-flute in Otaheite, we should immediately have pronounced them to be his.

One of the Dramatis Personæ is however highly exceptionable as to the propriety of it's appearance on the stage: it was very well to contrast the levity of *Peregrine Single* with the manly seriousness of his brother *Pertinax*; but the idiot *Percival*, though a character ludicrously managed, mingles something of pity and sometimes perhaps of disgust with our laughter; the more lamentable appearances of fatuity are indeed avoided, but enough remains to present us with a caricature of the most pitiable of all objects, the human mind in ruins. We are told, that it is one of the greatest enjoyments of a Spanish audience to behold a mob of bedlamites shrieking and dancing on the stage: such an anecdote may be true of a people, who with their national character have lost the noblest of manly feelings; but even this depravity of enjoyment is not so degrading, as the pleasure arising from the sight of that infantine simplicity and inane feebleness, which seems designed by Providence as a check to the vanity of human reason, and which it is never so painful to contemplate as in a young man, whose mind we had expected to have arrived at it's most vigorous maturity.

Page 110.—[*Caliban* in the *Tempest*.] Extract from the NEWS.

The *Tempest*, as it was performed on it's first night the week before last, presented a singular specimen of complicated authorship: DAVENANT originally suggested and assisted in it's alteration with DRYDEN, who is said to have been corrected by GARRICK, who is reported to have been refined by MR. KEMBLE: and it must be confessed that this progressive refinement seems to have succeeded excellently well in degrading the fancy and polluting the language of SHAKSPEARE. DRYDEN and DAVENANT thought they had done much by adding a female monster to *Caliban*, and a man who had never seen woman to a female who had never beheld any man but the old magician her father; but DRYDEN in two unlucky lines of his prologue confessed that

> ———Shakspeare's magic could not copied be,
> Within that circle none durst walk but he;

and in fact, neither of these additional conceptions is above the genius of a schoolboy. When once the monster *Caliban* is created, it is easy to fancy a thousand monsters. It is the same with the imitators of *Gulliver*: the giant among the little men, and the little man among the giants have been imagined once, and you can fancy nothing more of the same kind, that shall claim the praise of imagination. If poetical creation must be allowed to be an imitation of nature or at best of

an original combination of natural properties and images, still it ceases to be creative when it imitates itself: imagination must possess the novelty of a first idea; the additions to this first idea are mere conceptions resulting from the hint of the original; they are no more imagination than moonlight is the sun from which it is borrowed. But DRYDEN has added nothing worthy of his original even in the language: he has filled the dialogue, if not with direct ribaldry, with obscene double meanings and inuendos, which he has contrived to render as disgusting as possible by putting them in the mouths of two innocent virgins. MR. KEMBLE very judiciously omitted the female monster *Sycorax*, who differs from *Caliban* in nothing but sex: why could he not have omitted the monstrous language also, which the audience no sooner heard than they detested? The hand of DRYDEN, like that of Macbeth's wife, had a "damned spot" of which he could not rid himself: it communicated itself to his pen on all occasions serious and gay, and has been lamented not only by the admirers of that great genius, but with a very powerful, though even then a coarse feeling, by himself in his *Ode on the Death of Mrs. Killigrew*. MR. KEMBLE should read this Poem: he has no such licentious age to gratify as DRYDEN had; the nonsense of MESSRS. REYNOLDS and DIBDIN is a sufficient degradation of the stage without ransacking the old writers for more dangerous abuses. Not to mention the utter want of delicacy which induces the grave actor to set his young female performers before the public in this disgusting light, not to mention the insult he offers in their persons to the taste of the public, there is something monstrous in resuscitating to all their animation the vices of departed and penitent genius, in rendering them immortal not only in their infamy but in

their effects, in making the unhappy writer guilty of the posthumous wickedness of scattering poison on society, when both his hand and his will lie helplessly in the grave.

We should have said more of this in our present Paper, but Mr. KEMBLE has since omitted the obnoxious passages, though we are sorry that it was the hissing of the audience, and not his own taste, that produced the omission.

A young Lady of the name of MEADOWS appeared on the first night in the part of *Ariel*, and has since kept her situation with the most flattering applause. Her face though not handsome is sensible, and exhibits a sort of earnestness very natural to that active and enterprising spirit: her figure possesses elegance and delicacy; if we thought it wanted something of sprightly ease, perhaps we did not make sufficient allowance for that look of *corporeality* which an actress, however light her motions may be, cannot possibly avoid in the representation of a being, who is air itself. Her singing was perfectly appropriate: the lighter tones of her voice are much better than the lower ones, but the style of her songs was always delicate and tasteful. We very much admired the air of modesty which this young Lady preserved in a dress necessarily light and thin. Modesty is the charm that is the soonest discovered and admired in a female, though it is the least anxious to look forth or obtrude upon the beholder. The modesty of an actress is not only delightful from it's novelty, but it makes the spectator contented with himself, as well as with the performers, because he no longer blushes to patronize them.

EMERY's *Caliban* was one of the best pieces of acting we have ever seen. He conceived with infinite vigour that union of the man and the beast, which renders the monster so odious and malignant a being; nothing could be

more suitable to the character than the occasional growlings which finished the complaints of the savage, and the grinning eagerness of malignity which accompanied his curses on *Prospero*. It appeared to us however, that after he had drunk so much of a liquor to which he was unaccustomed, and indeed after he had acknowledged it's power by reeling on the stage, he should not have displayed so sober a voice in his song: we think that SHAKSPEARE intended this song to be given in the style of a drunkard, by the breaks which he has marked in the line—

——ban—ban—Ca-Caliban——

which could hardly have been a chorus. We do not recollect whether the commentators have noticed this.

The character of *Prospero* could not have been sustained by any one actor on the stage with so much effect as by Mr. KEMBLE. The majestic presence and dignity of the princely enchanter, conscious of his virtue, his wrongs, and his supernatural power, were displayed with an undeviating spirit, with that proud composure which seems a peculiar property of this actor. Is it not lamentable, that a performer who by forgetting a few singularities might produce twice the effect he does, will persist in them for no apparent reason but the love of singularity? Of his curious pronunciation of the word *aches*, which he converts into *aitches*, we shall say something in our next, when we intend to present our readers with a *Glossary of Mr. Kemble's Pronunciations.**

* See page 7 of this Appendix.

Page 145.—[*I do not speak from momentary consideration, for I have eagerly sifted the subject before.*] Extract from the NEWS of 16th March, 1806.

Academic Theatre.

The Sans Souci in Leicester-Place opened under this title, on Tuesday, for the purpose of proving, as the Proprietors expressed themselves in the bills, "how far children, well-tutored, are capable of giving amusement while they derive essential benefit themselves." The bills further stated that, the idea had been "borrowed from a neighbouring country, which had found such a plan of infinite benefit to the capital theatres." Of this latter statement, we understand, the information is erroneous, since the Parisian stage has acquired no great actors, though it may have gained one or two useful ones, from it's infant theatre. It is said that GARRICK made the same attempt; and that his little stage produced our present celebrated MISS POPE: but MISS POPE, or any other theatric genius, would no doubt have attained equal powers without such an education; for the art of acting is not to be taught by a schoolmaster, but by the world. The plan is a complication of errors. The tragedy of *Douglas* made the audience laugh, and such an effect was to have been expected, not only because the girls were twice as tall as the boys, and neither girls nor boys knew their parts, but because the majestic language of tragedy becomes burlesque in the mouth of childhood. We are pleased in

theatrical performances with the just imitation of life; but who can imitate life that has not seen it? An Academic Theatre, if such a thing be allowable at all, should never be a public one: it is ludicrous enough that people should pay to see the blunders of children; money might as well be asked for admittance to hear a lesson at school: all the difference is, that in one place Syntax is murdered, and in the other, SHAKSPEARE; or rather, that in the other, they murder both Syntax and SHAKSPEARE. That the little Academics will "derive essential benefit to themselves," we are as equally disposed to doubt, as that they will be of benefit to others. But rather than be tedious on so plain a subject, we shall resolve our conclusions into two parts:

I. It is impossible that they should amuse the public, because they cannot attain the end of the drama, which is the imitation of life.

II. It is impossible that they should benefit themselves, because the nature of their studies destroys that innocent simplicity of thought and behaviour which is the beauty and the happiness of childhood.

Extract from a subsequent NEWS.

Academic Theatre.

We have for some time past been very peculiar admirers of this institution, and we can no longer forbear to express our admiration. The epithet of beautiful has been applied by some philosophers to designs which attain their end; nothing therefore can be more beautiful than the idea of such a theatre, for it perfectly attains it's end, and is productive of the most charming

immorality and the most delightful vicious education. Nothing can be more interesting than the manners of it's juvenile mimics; their forwardness is so winning and their self possession so extremely natural, that it can be exceeded by nothing but the dispositions of their relations, so fond as they are of childhood and so eager to gain an honest livelihood by sacrificing it's health and it's simplicity.

The wise fondness of parents in private life is nothing to this: sometimes indeed we may admire the virtuous lessons of a father, who exhibits his infant to every company and to every flatterer. The child is introduced after dinner to sing a song, or to make a bow, or to tell the ladies amusing stories about the footman and the maid; the song is quite out of tune, the bow is the most awkward of scrapes, and the stories are utterly false; every body is delighted, and every body tells him he is a *perfect beauty* and the *best good child in the world:* he is then danced from one person's knee to another's, the gentlemen teach him how to fight and to quiz his father, and the ladies instruct him in the act of cheating his mother: these sensible amusements occupy the whole of the evening, for nobody can think of parting with the dear child, who runs the gauntlet through a host of flatterers and money-givers, becomes sleepy and fretful, and bursts out into a fit of crying as if twenty bodkins were piercing his ribs, till at last, amidst kisses and strugglings, and a little more flattery to make him quiet, he is sent to bed, and like the *best good child in the world* scratches the maid all the way up stairs. All this ruins the health and comfort of the child, but then he gets a great many shillings and sugar-plums, and is a *most wonderful little fellow.*

But the conductors of the Academic Theatre shew a parental concern for their children far superior to this wisdom of private life. If my little master is brought forward for the admiration of a room, the little actor must meet the thundering applause of a theatre: he stands in the glare of lamps, and in the gaze of ladies, his face is dashed with paint because he has no leisure for bed and therefore no colour of his own; he has not even a blush, for blushing is a weakness of which no player three feet high would be guilty. If a child is praised at home for telling *charming tales* of the romping servants, the little actor, nay the little actress, is applauded by a crowd for giving force to the more charming iniquities of WYCHERLEY and other glowing writers: thus nothing can be more proper for a little female than to represent the *Country Girl;* it gives her such new ideas and induces her to get rid of that foolish innocent behaviour which makes the other sex so distant and so cold: the little boys too in the performance of such a comedy gain much improvement of this kind; they become what is called *knowing fellows*, and can stare a female audience in the face with as much unconcern as they would contemplate a piece of gingerbread: this shews that they have no ridiculous bashfulness, which might be detrimental to their advancement in knowledge. For an audience indeed of any sort, our infant players seem to have a most mature contempt, and no doubt with reason, for nothing can be more contemptible than those who pay money for nothing.

Thus in a little time we shall behold these sprightly children totally exempt from the uncomfortable restrictions of childhood, such as regular hours, simpli-

city of manners, and innocence of mind; they will become so pale and so impudent, that while they are a great profit to their friends they will present a delightful spectacle to the whole town; the boys having learnt no trade and no regular habits will be a set of as *jolly fellows*, and as much use in the world, as any man who knows nothing can be; and though the girls may not be introduced on the stage of Covent-garden or Drury-lane Theatres, they will most probably display their virtues in the lobbies for the benefit of the rising generation. Surely there is not a parent who would not willingly encourage so laudable an institution: for his part, the writer of this article perfectly agrees with a gentleman, who said in his hearing, that it was a "*devilish* fine thing!"

Page 185.—[*a jot more naturally than he does his own.*] Extract from the NEWS.

TO THEATRICAL CORRESPONDENTS.

We have received a very curious letter from a Defender of MRS. ST. LEDGER, convicting us of a mistake respecting her performance of *Floranthe* in the *Mountaineers* and making some other observations on our criticism upon that lady. We take the first opportunity of acknowledging our error. Our readers will recollect that we accused MRS. ST. LEDGER of inanimation and want of feeling in the scene where *Octavian* faints at the sight of his mistress. The Defender of MRS. ST. LEDGER gives the following singular but conclusive reason for this

apparent fault in her performance: "It is well known in the theatre, that during the whole of that scene, MRS. ST. LEDGER is acting in direct opposition to her common sense, that she is not permitted to stir or breathe but by MR. KEMBLE's direction, that she is expressly forbid to go near him when he falls, to assist him when he rises, to kneel to him, or embrace him; in short she is obliged to appear an automaton." It is supposed, that "she would disconcert or put trammels on *Octavian*, and by that the audience would lose in one moment from MR. KEMBLE more than would have been repaid in the whole life of MRS. ST. LEDGER."

We never before heard such an absurd instance of MR. KEMBLE's disregard of theatrical propriety, or such a disgusting one of his vanity: he had better send all the actors about him from the stage, in scenes of this kind, that he may have room to astonish the audience at his leisure. His conduct reminds us of an ancient fable, in which the Great Bear wished to put out all the other constellations in order to shine by itself. It is to be hoped that the public will no more receive with their usual indulgence so flagrant a violation of nature and propriety. Actors are for the audience, not the audience for the actors; and MR. KEMBLE should pay a little less deference to his own conceit, and a little more to their judgment.

Page 186.—[*In which he has been so injudiciously imitated.*] Extract from the NEWS.

But with the powers of MR. RAE in *Octavian* we were most agreeably surprised. His voice is not remarkable

either for it's strength or it's variety, but the expression of his countenance possesses both, and where there is such expression there is always genius: this is invariably the criterion of a good actor, for to look for passions on a face always the same, like that of Mr. Pope for instance, is to look for meaning in a mahogany table. The representation of *Octavian* requires the most varied powers of countenance; for in the transitions from reason to madness, from absorbing melancholy to sudden and unaccountable gaiety, there should be no appearance of artifice or study: in the very midst of thought there should be an appearance of want of thought; there should be sudden change without a consciousness of change; and in short, while the actor has a reason for every action, he should appear to have no reason at all. Mr. Rae managed the sudden transitions with a rapid alteration of countenance, and with looks full of meaning, but he should not have accompanied them so perpetually with a stamp of the foot, the violent actions of insanity fill us with terror, but it is the silent soul of it's countenance, unaccompanied with the action of the limbs, that fills us with awe. His principle failure was in the change from wild gaiety or indifference to tearful melancholy; this change was always too sudden and always accompanied with sobbing, a fault which Mr. Rae, amidst some beauties, has copied from Elliston. The transition of insanity from gaiety to melancholy is not so sudden as the contrary change, because a sudden gaiety is a sort of desperate remedy for affliction; but the melancholy that follows is the effect of a false joy that gradually exhausts itself with it's own vehemence. If the grief however be sudden, it should not be instantly accompanied with sobbing; sobs are the effect of long and collected grief, of

sorrow yielding gradually to it's own thoughts; this may be observed even in children, who never sob till they have been repeatedly rebuked, or till they consider the case as desperate and unalterable. Mr. Rae throughout the drama did not sufficiently study these gradual transitions of emotion: in the recognition of his old friend *Roque*, he was too languid for it's suddeness; if it had been instantaneous it should have been more animated; but the recognition ought to have been gradual. We may always judge of the merits of a tragedian by observing whether he understands this gradual developement of the passions: any man can bellow with rage, can grin with joy, or cry with sorrow; but in the almost imperceptible gradations from one passion to another, in their irresolution, in their hesitation to alter or to unite, a knowledge of the human mind is necessary: an actor who is always vehement endeavours to escape the minute observation of the audience by astonishing them out of their faculties; he is like a bad player on the piano, who hides his ignorance of the delicacies of the art by thumping and slurring over the keys with an affected spirit, while a good musician varies our feelings with all the variety of sound, rises to the grand indeed with vigour, but drops to the melancholy through a gradual maze of semitones.

We believe Mr. Rae to have the genius of a tragedian; he wants study only. The first effort of this study, and indeed the first step towards the attainment of beauties, is to avoid gross defects, and we are happy to see that a young actor, who like all young actors is naturally given to imitation, has had the good sense and the courage to talk English in spite of Mr. Kemble's vagaries in pronunciation; Mr. Rae knows that there is no rule for pronunciation but custom, he knows that *thy* is

never called *the*, that none but nurses and maid-servants talk of their *vartue*, and that a man's *beard* is by no means a *bird*: if MR. KEMBLE were to walk into a barber's shop and say with his usual stiff gravity, "How is *the* leisure, friend? Can'st manage to dress my *bird*?" MR. RAE knows as well as ourselves, that the barber would reply with a stare, "Sir, this is not a cookshop but a barber's,"—and that he would shake his head, when the grave actor had walked away, and exclaim with a sigh, "Poor gentleman! He is not right in his head."—Whenever we think of these useless and absurd innovations in pronunciation, we cannot sufficiently express our astonishment that they should have become so common to the stage; the whole race of actors, not excepting ELLISTON himself, who we trusted would have aspired at the original praise of rescuing the good sense of the stage, have in this respect become servile imitators of MR. KEMBLE. What their motive can be, we cannot imagine; the courtiers of ALEXANDER had some reason in pretending to have a humpback like their king, for it was to their interest; but to imitate MR. KEMBLE in his abuse of words cannot advance the interest of men who come forward to the public as models of speaking. If MR. KEMBLE chuses to convert his *beard* into an animal, let him, in the name of all that is unaccountable, keep to his fancy; we have heard of a vapourish beau, who thought his nose consisted of a yard and a half of glass, but that is no reason why we should keep at a distance from our friends for fear our own noses should be broken; we should not be justified in calling the human race beasts, or to make any such alterations of the names of things, even though we have the authority of the renowned LAKU, king of Siam, who being awakened from sleep

and saved from assassination by the braying of an ass, commanded in the ardour of his gratitude that all mankind should be called asses; the story tells us, that whenever an ambassador from China came to the Siamese court, the *Okya Vang*, or *Master of the Ceremonies*, exclaimed, "Most potent LAKU, absolute Lord of the Universe, King of the White Elephants, and Keeper of the Sacred Tooth! a great jackass from China has come to speak with your Majesty!"

As MR. RAE however understands so well the wretched absurdity of this defect, we trust that it will be a lesson to him to imitate no actor whatever in any way, since he sees that even the best actors can be defective in their very pronunciation. Let him be neither KEMBLE, nor ELLISTON, nor any other tragedian; let him be nature, and he will be every thing.

On Thursday week the farce of the *Spanish Barber* introduced this gentleman to us in a comic character; but if his success in *Octavian* had induced us to hope that the Haymarket Theatre would not feel much longer the loss of ELLISTON in Tragedy, we are still afraid that it will be much lamented in Comedy: MR. RAE, who in his tragic character was animated and elegant, became in the intriguing *Count Almaviva* as inanimate and inelegant; he expresses with much force the despair of tragic love, but he cannot trifle, he cannot become the lively inamorato, who tricks an old guardian to his face and makes love to a lady by signs and mysteries. He had all the air of an actor who does not feel himself qualified for his part: he was confused and irresolute, and did not know what to do with himself when he was not speaking: he understood indeed the attitude that expresses an interest in the person addressing him, he bent forward with

a half smile and a mouth gently open, but the action was so constrained that he was evidently thinking not of what the person might say, but of what he himself should say when his turn came. In short, he did not perform the character as if he felt it. If this defect did not add to Mr. Rae's humour, perhaps it did to the excellent acting of Mathews in the Guardian; for every body must have laughed at an old man so stupid as not to discover the *Count*'s disguises: instead of expressing his fear of detection by an occasional side glance of suspicion, Mr. Rae shifted his attitude and bit his lips like one completely disturbed and not like a gallant of intrigue, bold in the business and prepared for consequences: when he affected a dry gravity too, he was tragically not comically grave; in pretending to coincide in the opinion of the man he was cheating, his face assumed the seriousness of real conviction, not that hypocritical austereness, so inimitably managed by Elliston, that double meaning of expression which contrives to let the audience into the secret, which has a lurking humour under it's very frown, and in the midst of a tone of importance and an air of candour gives the lie to it's own sincerity. We think Mr. Rae incapable of comic feeling, and therefore he will be always incapable of comic expression: at any rate he will not remunerate the theatre for the loss of Elliston in characters of elegant humour. We hope he will study himself a little more in this respect: self-knowledge is as useful to the actor, as it is to the philosopher: it is seldom found indeed but in minds of the higher order, but that is the very reason we expect it in Mr. Rae.

Page 190.—[*Sir Harry Wildair.*] Extract from the NEWS.

DRURY-LANE.

FARQUHAR's Comedy of the *Constant Couple, or A Trip to the Jubilee*, was revived on Wednesday night. The character of this author's Muse is a lively sensuality, well busied by plot, and well inspired with fanciful wit and laughing satire. The lady is consequently not much given to morality; she talks rather too freely, and is attired in an undress, not the most modestly disposed; but much of the danger, which such habits might produce, is perhaps done away by her romping vivacity, which seems the effect rather of animal spirits and good nature than of a regular inclination for vice. The *Constant Couple* is, perhaps, the most immoral of any of his pieces; for his hero, whom he has endeavoured to adorn with pleasing qualities, is an assemblage of all the vices of inconsiderate debauchery, and makes them the subject of his vanity, and the object of his ambition: but we question, whether bad examples have sent so much contagion from the Drama as has been imagined: the pestilence is rather in the lobbies than on the stage. FARQUHAR did not write with great attention to dramatic rules, and there is therefore great irregularity both in the action and the dialogue of his pieces; for this deficiency however, he compensates, like our great bard, by the true spirit of genius: we by no means condemn rules in an attainment so generally artificial as dramatic writing; but their observance is easily

dispensed with, when there is truth to instruct and fancy and wit to delight us. There is one mistaken idea respecting this Author, which it is wonderful could have been so long entertained, as nothing seems easier of confutation. It has been said that his chief excellence lay in painting the lively finished gentleman, and the character of *Sir Harry Wildair* is cited as an example. The heroes of Farquhar are undoubtedly sufficiently lively, but that any one of them is a finished gentleman, this very character of *Sir Harry Wildair*, who is the greatest man of them all, entirely disproves. Pope has exclaimed,

What pert low dialogue has Farquhar writ!

and it is true; for he cannot refrain from vulgarity even in his most accomplished characters. A finished gentleman never indulges in boisterous mirth, in low language or in vulgar amours: *Sir Harry* does all this and more, and the best part of his character is that his good temper is never to be ruffled. His jovial gaiety and knowledge of the town make him admired as a man of wit and fashion, but how many men of wit and fashion are there who cannot boast the characters of finished gentlemen? We cannot imagine that it was the author's intention to represent such a rare character: he wished rather to amuse than to instruct his audience, and had *Sir Harry Wildair* been a complete gentleman, he would have won more of our esteem, but not half so much of our merriment.

Elliston did not catch the *curiosa felicitas* of the Baronet's character, and never before exhibited a vivacity so constrained; *Sir Harry* appeared like a man laughing with the tooth-ache; he seemed to do every thing to please every body else, and nothing to please himself. This was owing perhaps to Mr. Elliston's labour at the

finished gentleman; if so, he has yet to learn what we have before advanced, that *Sir Harry Wildair* and the finished gentleman have very little to do with each other. We are of opinion that he will perform the part much better, if he will give greater loose to his vivacity, and not be appalled with those finical critics, who like Lord Chesterfield are continually bawling in his ear, *the Gentleman! the Graces! the Graces!*

Further Extract from the News.

Mr. Elliston repeated his *Sir Harry Wildair* on Tuesday night, and with an ease and vivacity which proved his failure on the first representation to have been merely the result of too anxious an exertion. His spirit was now the genuine spirit of the author, vigorous in all places and at all times, and he may reckon the acquisition of the jovial Baronet as no small addition to the circle of his theatrical constituents.

AN ESSAY

ON THE

APPEARANCE, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES

OF THE

DECLINE OF BRITISH COMEDY.

(From the NEWS.)

SECT. 1ST.—ON THE APPEARANCE OF THIS DECLINE.

THE chief object of the following criticism is to expose in a mass the errors of the present Comic Drama, to shew that they are as obnoxious to serious argument as to ridicule, and to convince those Readers, who have not immediately witnessed the faults of our dramatists, and might therefore be amazed at the perpetual peal which this Paper rings upon their names, that a love of our country's literature and honour is a sufficient reason for the exposure of such writers. The vanity of these writers, who cannot imagine that any critic should unceasingly object to their manœuvres without personal hostility, has rendered it necessary on our part to disclaim such a feeling entirely, and we repeat, that we know nothing of these men but their dramatic attempts: we hope and believe that they are good private characters; but they are doing all they can to ruin the British Drama, and they must be treated as the public violators of literature. It must be understood at the same time, that when we speak of them as the distinct race of modern dramatists, we confound with them neither SHERIDAN nor CUMBERLAND; the former

of these Gentlemen, who is one of the first wits that this or any age has produced, belongs to former times, for he has long ceased to write: the latter has for some time been in the dotage of literature, has been as fond of writing as other old men are of talking, and has written to as little purpose: we will not judge of the colour of his head when it is become grey.

Even the present dramatists however might be endured, if they would confine themselves to the praise of that farce, with which they have so besotted the stage, if they would be content to follow better writers with little pieces of avowed caricature; they might occupy indeed the chief honours of Sadler's Wells or the Circus, without a single wish on our part to interrupt their exclusive possession. But when they usurp the rank of comedy, when they seat themselves in the chairs of those great comic writers, who have won the palm from Spain and from Italy to divide it with France, we are filled with indignation and contempt. A royal jester is a very harmless and a very merry sort of personage, but when the King's jester places himself on his master's throne, it is time for the courtiers to look to the royal dignity.

It is the observation of all Europe that the British drama is rapidly declining. Of tragedy indeed we have nothing: but this subject will be considered hereafter. Every foreigner who visits England, confirms the amazement and contempt of preceeding travellers; the Spaniard wonders that we can exclaim against the hasty farces of his favourite Lope, and the German finds a rival of the melancholy absurdities of his own stage in the merry monstrosities of ours. So manifest indeed are the successive tricks of the dramatists and their utter want of every thing solid, that a person new to theatrical entertainments has nothing to do but to guard himself, as he

would in a juggler's room, against any thing that might cheat him into applause, and it is in vain, when he leaves the theatre, that he would recollect one single witticism or logical sentence that is worth remembrance, one remark on men and manners that could so meet the acknowledgment of the closet as to pass into a maxim, as hundreds have done in our old comic writers, as thousands in SHAKSPEARE.

A comic writer of the present day may be immediately distinguished by his dislike of all those difficulties, which oppose a writer ambitious of imitating the best models: the whole object of his pen seems to be the attainment of applause in the easiest manner possible, and he accordingly writes for the galleries, or in other words, for that part of the audience, which is the least capable of judging but the noisiest in declaring it's judgment. He appeals therefore to the eye and to the ear, because they are the soonest pleased with the least reason: a new piece of scenery or an uncouth dress conquers the visual faculties of the spectators, and a volley of puns is the signal for the author's triumph. This artifice of punning, which has become a perfect system with the dramatists, is the method by which the author rids himself of the difficulty of wit, as his flowery language, when he becomes what is called sentimental, is his device to forego the necessity of thinking. By these means language becomes separated from ideas, since mere punning is nothing but an unexpected assimilation of sounds and mere floweriness, like a harlequin jacket, is nothing but a surprising combination of colours. The incidents and characters of his pieces always agree in one alternative, they are either of very manifest common place, or they are clad in the most monstrous disguises to gain the appearance of novelty; they remind us of the tricks practised, according to a modern

traveller, at some of our country fairs, where a vulgar woman has been dressed in catskins and a tumultuous periwig, and exhibited as a wild Indian, not to mention a shaved bear, who in a check shirt and trowsers gained a great deal of applause as an Ethiopian savage. If he exhibits a character that has been too often handled to stand inquiry, he gives a new tone to it's appearance by some prominent peculiarity of manner, which, however ill-adapted it may be, immediately catches the attention by the mere force of oddity, and deprecates your censure for the sake of the laughter it creates. This peculiarity generally consists in some hacknied phrase or cant maxim, which is used upon all occasions, seasonable and unseasonable, and is very often as suitable to the mouth of the speaker as a tobacco-pipe would be in the lips of the Venus de Medicis.

The author however is not content to do every thing for the sake of pleasing the more easy part of the audience, but in order that they may be more interested in his behalf, he tells them, in the most abject terms, how entirely he is their most humble servant: he literally begs them to be blind to his errors; that is, to care more about his nonsense than the literary reputation of their country; and for this purpose, two petitions, in the shape of Prologue and Epilogue, are generally presented to the audience, the one to bespeak their kindness, and the other to secure it. In the interval however of these petitions, the house is assailed by the masterpiece of these seductive playwrights, in a profusion of encomiums on the spirit, the loyalty, and the invincibility of the British nation: it is never considered, that every body could roar out these encomiums with an ardour quite as literary, and that every body may feel a patriotic pride in his country, without swelling with self-importance at the flattery of a cunning author: if the author can get applause, he

does not care whether the applause be consistent either with his pretensions or our dignity: he gives praise for praise; and while he is exalting our invincible wisdom, is considering into what sort of a clap he shall conquer us.

The art of a modern Dramatist then consists in a series of deceptions on his audience; and he manages, like a true juggler, to make the audience assist in the very tricks with which he contrives to astonish them. The least use of common perception, however, will always distinguish his artifice, and he will be detected either in the partial, or more often in the indiscriminate, exercise of the following errors, which in fact compose the whole of a modern comic writer's genius:—

An inveterate love of punning;

A deformed alteration of common characters and incidents;

A dialogue either extremely flowery or extremely familiar;

An affectation of ardent loyalty, and, consequent to this affectation, a gross flattery of his audience;

Lastly, as flattery and timid meanness generally accompany each other, a most abject system of begging the favour of the house, particularly in prologue and epilogue.

SECTION II.—ON THE CAUSES OF THIS DECLINE.

We do not know which should afford better subject for astonishment, the origin or the toleration of this dramatic corruption. The evil perhaps would be less endured, if it's causes were detected; for it is one of the inconsistencies of human nature to reject error not so much for it's effect as it's cause: we do not always blush at acting

wrongly, but we blush most painfully when we find that our reason for it has become ridiculous, or unfashionable, or perhaps out of date. Literature has it's modes like dress, and all popular changes are apt to rush into extremes: the beaux of Charles the Second's age suddenly retreated into a forest of peruke, because the Puritans had valued themselves upon their own lank hair; the English drama broke out into mere farce, because it began to despise the solemn foppery of sentimental Comedy. But we have now no reason for extremes either in the appearance or the productions of our heads; let us get rid of our dramatic perukes, and exhibit something like a natural pericranium.

The causes of the decline of comedy, or in other words, of the present predominance of farce, are certainly not to be attributed to the present writers. Literary delusions never become lasting with a literary people, unless they are supported by the authority of real genius. There are always so many comparative models of writing, that none but writers capable of giving good examples, can recommend bad ones. It was LUCAN and SENECA, men in other respects of true genius, that encouraged the Romans into bombast, and not NERO and the poetasters of his court, who were inspired with nothing else. It was DONNE, and COWLEY, writers of original wit, that recommended the conceits of the Metaphysical Poets, and not such grotesque pedants as CLEIVELAND and FLATMAN. The modern farci-comic writers would never have been elevated into their present sway, had they depended solely on themselves. Like the drunken tinker in the play, they must have been carried by more rational beings than themselves upon that throne, which like him they disgrace by their vanity and buffoonery. Sheep have been found on the tops of oaks, but it is the eagle that

has borne them thither. In short, we must attribute the farcical decline of English comedy to the indignant haste of Goldsmith in overthrowing sentimental comedy, and to the farcical extreme in which he was followed and even outrun by his immediate successors.

This species of writing, which from it's imitation of the more chequered fortunes of life might be rendered the most natural picture of mankind, was indeed in a most desponding way in Goldsmith's time; it began with Kelly and others to make those appalling faces, which mark the unmeaning sorrows of infancy, and prepare us for a tempest of weeping, and it advanced rapidly in misery with Mr. Cumberland, who has since been so ably seconded by Mrs. Inchbald: it's full growth however was reserved for Mr. Morton, who with an observation of life worthy of better cultivation, has indulged in so furious a mixture of the laughing and the weeping, that he has thrown comedy into absolute hysterics. Such a style of writing possessed in itself the means of it's destruction, for the house was divided against itself. Goldsmith however saw nothing in the unnatural struggle but the death of all comic humour, and out of pure pity he became extravagantly merry, just as the celebrated Dr. Radcliffe to cure a patient of the quinsey endeavoured to make him laugh by playing all sorts of unseasonable antics. The farce succeeded, the extravagant though delightful vagaries of *She Stoops to Conquer*, like the touch of the painter, turned the weeping face of the town into a laughing one; O'Keeffe, a man of much humour, afterwards kept up the peal, till it became mere noise and grimace with Mr. Reynolds and his brother merry-andrews Messrs. Dibdin and Cherry. Inattention, or haste, or very possibly exhausted powers, gave a strong support to these writers in the pen of Mr. Colman, a man, who with the dramatic

reputation of his father to urge him to his proper goal, the hopes of good writers to invite him, and a great fund of natural humour to support him in his attempt, has deserted the cause of literature, and does not blush, not only to join in a debauch of merriment which he must despise, but like a true literary rake, to defend his companions by the most miserable merry sophistry. This gentleman, in a prologue that does and does not deserve to be remembered, says, if we recollect rightly,

> If we give trash, as some few pertlings say,
> Why flocks an audience nightly to our play?

We answered him in a distich of our own:—

> If there's no merit in six yards of haunch,
> Why flock the town to gaze on Lambert's paunch?

But we are almost ashamed to refute an argument, which is contradicted by every pantomime exhibition, by every petty shew, nay, by every house of bad reputation in town.

Such, we imagine, is the simple cause of the decline of our comedy. The great *existing* reason is the mere want of critical opposition. If the newspapers were unanimous, they might overthrow the farci-comic writers in a few months. As the body of the people is always much too void of reflection to ask itself why it is satisfied, the dramatic taste of the town is at the mercy of any set of men that can control the majority of the periodical prints, and it is somewhat unlucky for good letters, that the greatest number of these Editors are too much occupied with politics to care, much less to know any thing about the drama. The playwrights either procure the favours of their careless critics by an eager advance of all their little powers of accommodation, or

worm themselves into their gay hours of confidence; and what is more philanthropic than the maudlin sympathy of a second bottle? By these means the newspaper editors certainly become the true friends of the dramatists; for while the latter trust their critics with all the tricks and dependencies of theatric authorship, the former keep them a profound secret from the town, and would rather tell us any falsehoods than betray their trust. Till the evil therefore outgrows concealment, it is natural enough that the majority of the town should be willing to believe the majority of it's critics. Critical opinion is like madness: if it is confined to an individual, every body is alarmed: if it influences a sect or a party, attention is scattered by it's generality.

SECTION III.—ON THE CONSEQUENCES.

The good disposition which men of little judgment manifest towards our present dramatists may in some measure be attributed to the harmlessness of their drama, which can certainly offend nobody by it's satire: the ignorant and the vicious find themselves safe from chastisement, and they will naturally assist those who ensure their safety. But this very kind of harmlessness gives the last finish to the stupidity of the farci-comic writers, and produces a general effect the total reverse of harmless; for in consequence of their monstrous caricature and it's perfect inapplicability to human manners, the end of comedy, which should satirize the lighter vices and follies of mankind, is utterly destroyed. They paint rakes indeed, and coxcombs, and cheats; but the characters lose so many of their proper characteristics in their attempt to be facetious, that it seems the endeavour of their life to afford amusement, and thus their natural character is perpetually struggling with their theatric one: the rake is vicious merely as far as he thinks he can

be pleasant; the coxcomb is taught to think more of the galleries than of himself; the cheat pursues his iniquities merely that they may be agreeable tricks; the selfish, in short, live wholly for others; and the author thinks, not how he may improve his audience by painting it's likeness, but how he may flatter it by making it's features beautiful, or amuse it by shewing how merrily he can distort them. As nobody therefore finds his likeness on the stage, nobody is improved by it; virtue is not encouraged by the representation of it's *unpresuming* countenance, nor is vice alarmed at the deformity of it's passion-tortured features: the scene is so far drawn forward, as it were, into the part appropriated to the audience, or in other words it is so evidently the intention of the author, and consequently of his actors, to stand before the spectator as mere candidates for applause, that the stage becomes literally abstracted from it's abstraction, it's professed absence from an overlooked multitude is forgotten, and this is the reason why the actors so perpetually enter the scene with their hats off in the open air; they forget the fields and the forests, they imagine themselves entering a room full of company, and they are as full of respect as a showman, who comes into a parlour on a winter's evening to amuse the children with his grotesque shadows. The theatres therefore should take down those inscriptions over their stage, which invite us to contemplate the representation of ourselves, since that magnificent, that polished mirror, which reflected all our features with so animated a resemblance, which obeyed the momentary varieties of our attitude and glanced forth the nicest movements of our countenance, has been exchanged for a glass full of excrescences and undulations, in which the human figure becomes a mere laughable monstrosity, a thing of grimace and distortion, a shadow that mocks the spectator with fantastic ugliness.

The vicious fashionable have been so happy in the security they enjoy during this sleep of satire, that they start with dismay at every little movement of it's hand indicative of waking, and the managers of Drury-lane Theatre have still to explain, why a comedy, called the *Faro Table*, which was reported to contain a fine satire on gaming, and to have been written by the late celebrated Mr. Tobin, was suddenly withdrawn from the public expectation, not only after it's announcement, but after it's complete study by the actors. We have already expressed our indignation at this incident, which argues a control over the drama and a timidity in the managers, not to be endured in a nation so free and comparatively so virtuous as ours. Such a circumstance displays at once all the ridiculous imbecility of our usual comedies, which are suffered to exist merely because vice itself can laugh at them without feeling unpleasantly.

It must be mentioned, at the same time, in praise of Drury-lane, that it has at least promised to become *rational* next season, and that it has never been so totally occupied with farci-comedy as Covent-garden: why the grave manager Mr. Kemble, who with all his faults is a man of judgment, and possesses a discriminative relish of our great writers, should suffer the everlasting antics of the modern merry-andrews about him, is an enigma we never could solve; the idea of him under these circumstances is as ludicrously incongruous, as it would be to see the statue of William Penn surrounded by carved dancing dogs.

At any rate, let us always repeat to ourselves what Mr. Giffard, a man of vigorous learning and the first satirist of his time, has said of the present comic writers—"*All the fools in the kingdom seem to have risen up and exclaimed with one voice*—Let us write for the theatres."

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ERRATA.

IN THE ESSAYS.

Page 78, line 9, for *possible* read *possibly.*

—— 127, — 8, from bottom, for *imitable* read *inimitable.*

—— 151, — 9, ———— (in the note) for *persecution* read *persecutors.*

IN THE APPENDIX.

Page 16, line 1, for *mortalized* read *immortalized.*

PROSPECTUS

OF

THE EXAMINER,

A NEW SUNDAY PAPER,*

Upon Politics, Domestic Economy, and Theatricals.

PRICE 7½*d.*

THE promises of newspapers have become almost as valuable as the promises of courtiers. Every new journal grows vain upon it's modest pretensions; the Proprietors with much unintentional simplicity are always flattering themselves on their industry and genius; and it must be confessed, that no politics can be more impartial, no criticism more refined, and no general information given with a more literary air, than what these gentlemen intend. But all this is magnificent in it's announcement only. The newspaper proves to be like the generality of it's species, very mean in it's subserviency to the follies of the day, very miserably merry in it's puns and it's stories, extremely furious in politics, and quite as feeble in criticism. You are invited to a literary conversation, and you find nothing but scandal and common-place. There is a flourish of trumpets, and enter Tom Thumb. There is an earthquake, and a worm is thrown up.

* The first number of this Paper appeared on the 3d January, 1808.

The Reader anticipates us here. "Ay," cries he, "here is the old Prospectus cant: every thing is wretched in comparison with the *New* Paper: we shall have the ancient *But* in a minute—*But the Proprietors of the Examiner scorn to come forward*—and so forth." This is a very good observation, but a little inapplicable. The Proprietors, who will be the Writers of the EXAMINER, cannot entirely deceive the town, for they are in some degree already known to the Public. *The Gentleman, who has hitherto conducted, and is at present conducting the THEATRICAL DEPARTMENT in the NEWS*, will criticise the Theatre in the EXAMINER; and as the Public have allowed the possibility of IMPARTIALITY in that department, we do not see why the same possibility may not be obtained in POLITICS.

The great error of politicians is that old fancy of SOLON, who insisted that it was infamous for a citizen to be of no party, and endeavoured by a law to make the Athenians hypocrites. This conceit not only destroys every idea of mediation between two parties, but does not even suppose that both may be wrong. Yet all history may convince us, that he, who resolutely professes himself attached to any party, is in danger of yielding to every extreme for the mere reputation of his opinion: he will argue for the most manifest errors of this or that statesman, because he has hitherto agreed with him—an obstinancy as stupid, as if a pedestrian were to express his satisfaction with a tempest at night, because he had enjoyed sunshine in the morning.

The big and little Endians in *Gulliver* have not

yet taught us the folly of mere party; and one of the most ridiculous inconsistencies in the human character is that enjoyment, which all ages have expressed in satirical productions, without receiving benefit from them: they drink the physic with a bold and pleasant countenance, and instantly prepare to counteract it's effect; or rather, every man thinks the physic excellent for every body but himself.—"Party," says SWIFT, "is the madness of many for the gain of few." When *Scarmentado* in VOLTAIRE arrived at Ispahan, he was asked whether he was for black mutton or white mutton: he replied, that it was equally indifferent to him, provided it was tender. A wise man knows no party abstracted from it's utility, or existing, like a shadow, merely from the opposition of some body. Yet in the present day, we are all so erroneously sociable, that every man, as well as every journal, must belong to some class of politicians; he is either Pittite or Foxite, Windhamite, Wilberforcite, or Burdettite; though at the same time two-thirds of these disturbers of coffee-houses might with as much reason call themselves Hivites or Shunamites, or perhaps Bedlamites.

A crowd is no place for steady observation. The EXAMINER has escaped from the throng and bustle, but he will seat himself by the way-side and contemplate the moving multitude as they wrangle and wrestle along. He does not mean to be as noisy as the objects of his contemplation, or to abuse them for a bustle which resistance merely increases, or even to take any notice of those mischievous wags who might kick the mud towards him as they drive along: but the more rational part of the

multitude will be obliged to him, when he warns them of an approaching shower, or invites them to sit down with him and rest themselves, or advises them to take care of their pockets. As to the language and style in which his advice will be given, it would be ridiculous to promise that which haste or the head-ach might hinder him from performing. Perhaps it must still be left to statesmen to amuse in politics.

With respect to the THEATRIC CRITICISM, the Proprietors merely observe, that it will be in the same spirit of opinion and manner with the *present* theatrical observations in the *News*. The Critic trusts he has already proved in that paper, that he has no respect for error however long established, or for vanity however long endured. He will still admire Mr. KEMBLE when dignified, but by no means when pedantic; he hopes still to be satisfied with Mr. DIBDIN in a Christmas pantomime, but is afraid he shall differ with him as to his powers for comedy. Yet the town may be assured, that if either Mr. DIBDIN or Mr. REYNOLDS should suddenly become a man of wit, the Critic will be as eager to announce the metamorphosis as if it were the discovery of transmuting lead into gold. Perhaps he may be considered vain in proclaiming his qualifications for criticism, but he cannot help betraying, how infinitely the dramatists of the day have abused him. He would not have mentioned this, but the natural infirmity of an author, speaking of himself, must be pardoned for once, especially when he does not dwell upon so flattering a subject.

The little attention which newspapers pay to the FINE ARTS, is no little proof of a very indifferent

taste, especially when we consider that this country possesses it's own school of painting; that we have artists like WEST, who claim every merit so much admired in the old masters except indeed that of being in the grave; and that a youth, named WILKIE, has united HOGARTH with the Dutch school by combining the most delicate character with the most delicate precision of drawing. These great geniuses make us the best compensation for the loss of the drama by reviving Tragedy and Comedy on the canvas. Yet they are scarcely ever noticed except in those annual sketches of the Exhibition, which a newspaper cannot help giving because they constitute part of the fugitive news. We will try therefore to do a little better. An artist will conduct our department of the Fine Arts. If he does not promise for his taste, he promises for his industry. He will be eager in announcing to the public not only the promiscuous merits of exhibitions, but those individual pictures which deserve to engage the public attention singly, those happy rarities, which like the *Wolfe and La Hogue* of WEST, and the *Village Politicians*, *Blind Fiddler*, and *Steward receiving Rent*, of WILKIE, almost create æras in the history of painting.

As it requires but a moderate portion of good sense to regulate the DOMESTIC ECONOMY of a newspaper, the Proprietors might indulge themselves a little more perhaps in promising peculiar care in this department. At any rate they will never acquiesce in those gayer or gloomier follies of the world, whether of rakes or of prize-fighters, to which the papers give their sanction with so cold-blooded an indifference. They do not intend, like

the *Society for the Suppression of Vice*, to frighten away the innocent enjoyments of the poor by dressing Religion in a beadle's laced hat and praying heaven to bless the ways of informers; but they will never speak of adultery and seduction with levity, nor affect to value that man, however high his rank or profuse of interest his connexion, who dares to take advantage of his elevation in society to trample with gayer disdain on the social duties. As to those selfish and vulgar cowards, whether jockies, who will run a horse to death, or cock-fighters, who sit down to a table on which fowls are served up alive, —as to those miserable ruffians, whether the ornaments of a gaol or the disgracers of a noble house, who thank God for giving them strength by endeavouring to annihilate the strength of others, who, like a Hottentot beauty, value themselves upon a few bones, and call fighting for a few guineas English spirit, they are most probably out of the reach of literary ridicule, which must be read before it is felt: but we shall use our strongest endeavour to hold up them and their admirers to the contempt of others who might mistake their murderous business for manliness. What! Shall English noblemen crowd the highways to admire the exploits of a few thieves and butchers? Shall they rush from the court and the senate to enrich a few sturdy vagabonds with the labour of their virtuous peasantry, to shout over a fallen brute, and to be astonished at that sublime merit which is excelled by the leg of a dray-horse? What an amiable vivacity!

We are almost afraid to say that NO ADVERTISEMENTS WILL BE ADMITTED in the EXAMINER, for this assertion generally means that

they will; but the public will be inclined perhaps to believe the Proprietors when they declare, that though they intend to be engaged in the publication of books, they will not advertise a single one of their own works. Advertisements therefore will hardly be inserted for any body else: they shall neither come staring in the first page at the breakfast table to deprive the reader of a whole page of entertainment, nor shall they win their silent way into the recesses of the paper under the mask of general paragraph to filch even a few lines: the public shall neither be tempted to listen to somebody in the shape of a wit who turns out to be a lottery-keeper, nor seduced to hear a magnificent oration which finishes by retreating into a peruke or rolling off into a blacking-ball.

If some weekly papers however have a page of Advertisements at the beginning, they have also a page of Markets at the end: they commence by informing us of the retail of London, and conclude by communicating the wholesale. This is a pleasant uniformity, especially in a paper containing all the news of the week. But as there are fifteen daily papers that presents us with advertisements six days in the week, and as there is perhaps about one person in a hundred, who is pleased to see two or three columns occupied with the mutability of cattle and the vicissitudes of leather, the Proprietors of the EXAMINER will have as little to do with bulls and raw hides as with lottery-men and wig-makers.

Above all, the New Paper shall not be disgraced by those abandoned hypocrites, whose greatest quackery is their denial of being quacks. Their vile indecency shall not gloat through the mask of

philanthropy, sickness shall not be flattered into incurability, nor debauchery indulged to the last gasp by the promises of instant restoration. If the paper cannot be witty or profound, it shall at least never be profligate.

The EXAMINER will be printed on the largest paper wrapped into a form perfectly novel to this country and perfectly convenient both for reading and binding. The types are newly cast in the foundry of Messrs. FRY and STEELE, and the presses constructed by Mr. MATTHEWS on the Stanhope plan, which produces an increased power in their mechanism, and therefore a more equal effect in the clearness and decision of the print.

Orders for the supply of this Paper are requested to be sent to the Office of the EXAMINER, No. 15, *Beaufort Buildings, Strand, London;* or, if given to the News Venders they will be properly attended to.—The Papers will always be put into the hands of the Newsmen at a very early hour on Sunday Morning.

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October, 1807.

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